

One Hundred and Sixteen

# SERMONS

Preached out of the

## FIRST LESSONS

At *Morning* and *Evening* Prayer, for  
all SUNDAYS in the YEAR.

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By *WILLIAM READING, M. A.*  
Keeper of the LIBRARY at Sion-College.

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VOLUME the THIRD.

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*The* SECOND EDITION.

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To the Worshipful

**HENRY MARSHALL, Esq;**

Member of Parliament for *Agmondesham*  
in *Buckinghamshire*.

Worthy Sir,

DCANNOT publish this second Edition of my Sermons, without thankfully acknowledging your Favour to the first, and your kind commendation of them, particularly to that liberal Gentleman *Mr. Edward Colman*, your Friend and my Benefactor upon that occasion. And having been assured by another of your Friends lately deceased, that you exprest some desire to see a new Impression of them, the first having been long since disposed of, I have ventured at my own charge to reprint them, and presume to beg the con-

## DEDICATION.

tinuance of your favourable opinion of them, hoping that if they are patronized by you and your Friends, they may be received into good Families, and prove of some use, especially to Children and Servants, as being short and mostly historical, and therefore pretty easily read and remember'd. For which purpose if you will be pleased to mention them as you shall have opportunity, you will very much oblige me, who heartily wish you the blessings of this life, and of that which is to come, and shall ever remain,

SIR,

*Your sincerely thankful*

*and faithful Servant,*

WILLIAM READING.

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THE  
TEXTS  
Of the THIRD VOLUME.

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SERMON LVII. On the Fourth Sunday  
after TRINITY.

1 Sam. xii. 16, 17. *Now therefore stand still and see this great thing which the Lord will do before your eyes.*

*Is it not Wheat-harvest to day? I will call unto the Lord, and he shall send Thunder and Rain; that ye may perceive and see that your Wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a King.*

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SERMON LVIII. On the Fourth Sunday  
after TRINITY.

1 Sam. xiii. 13, 14. *And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people; because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee.*

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## The T E X T S.

### S E R M O N L I X. On the Fifth Sunday after T R I N I T Y.

1 Sam. xv. 22. *And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in Burnt-offerings and Sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than Sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of Rams.* P. 31

### S E R M O N L X. On the Fifth Sunday after T R I N I T Y.

1 Sam. xvii. 50. *So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine and slew him.* P. 46

### S E R M O N L X I. On the Sixth Sunday after T R I N I T Y.

2 Sam. xii. 13. *And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.* P. 61

### S E R M O N L X I I. On the Sixth Sunday after T R I N I T Y.

2 Sam. xix. 1. *And it was told Joab, Behold, the King weepeth and mourneth for Absalom.* P. 76

### S E R M O N L X I I I. On the Seventh Sunday after T R I N I T Y.

2 Sam. xxi. 1. *Then there was a Famine in the days David, of three years, year after year: And David enquired of the Lord; and the Lord answered, It is for Saul and for his bloody House, because he slew the Gibeonites.* P. 92

# The T E X T S.

## SERMON LXIV. On the Seventh Sunday after TRINITY.

2 Sam. xxiv. 10. *And David's heart smote him after he had numbered the people: and David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.*

p. 108

## SERMON LXV. On the Eighth Sunday after TRINITY.

1 Kings xiii. 1. *And behold there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel, and Jeroboam stood by the Altar to burn Incense.*

p. 122

## SERMON LXVI. On the Eighth Sunday after TRINITY.

1 Kings xvii. 24. *And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.* p. 138

## SERMON LXVII. On the Ninth Sunday after TRINITY.

1 Kings xviii. 17, 18. *And it came to pass when Ahab saw Elijah, that he said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy Father's House, in that ye have forsaken the Commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.*

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# The T E X T S.

## SERMON LXVIII. On the Ninth Sunday after TRINITY.

1 Kings xix. 10. *And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only am left; and they seek my life to take it away.*

p. 167

## SERMON LXIX. On the Tenth Sunday after TRINITY.

1 Kings xxi. 28, 29. *And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tisbite, saying: Seest thou how Aba bumbleth himself before me? Because he bumbleth himself before me, I will not bring the Evil in his days; but in his Son's days will I bring the Evil upon his House.*

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## SERMON LXX. On the Tenth Sunday after TRINITY.

1 Kings xxii. 35. *And the battel increased that day; and the King was stayed up in his Chariot against the Syrians, and died at even.*

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## SERMON LXXI. On the Eleventh Sunday after TRINITY.

2 Kings v. 18. *In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my Master goeth into the House of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow my self in the House of Rimmon: when I bow down my self in the House of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.*

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## The T E X T S.

### SERMON LXXII. On the Eleventh Sunday after TRINITY.

2 Kings ix. 1, 2, 3. *And Elisa the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thy hand, and go to Ramoth-Gilead. And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehosaphat, the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber. Then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head; and say, Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not.*

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### SERMON LXXIII. On the Twelfth Sunday after TRINITY.

2 Kings x. 31. *But Jehu took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of Israel with all his Heart: for he departed not from the Sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to Sin.*

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### SERMON LXXIV. On the Twelfth Sunday after TRINITY.

2 Kings xviii. 4. *He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nebushtan.*

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### SERMON LXXV. On the Thirteenth Sunday after TRINITY.

2 Kings xix. 37. *And it came to pass as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his God, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his Sons smote him with the Sword: And they escaped into the Land of Armenia, and Esaraddon his Son reigned in his stead.*

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## The T E X T S.

### SERMON LXXVI. On the Thirteenth Sunday after TRINITY.

2 Kings xxiii. 25. *And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses, neither after him arose there any like him.* p. 282

### SERMON LXXVII. On the Fourteenth Sunday after TRINITY.

Jer. v. 1. *Run ye to and fro through the Streets of Jerusalem, and see now and know, and seek in the broad Places thereof, if ye can find a Man, if there be any that executeth Judgment, that seeketh the Truth, and I will pardon it.* p. 299

### SERMON LXXVIII. On the Fourteenth Sunday after TRINITY.

Jerem. xxii. 3. *Thus saith the Lord, Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.* p. 312

### SERMON LXXIX. On the Fifteenth Sunday after TRINITY.

Jerem. xxxv. 18, 19. *And Jeremiah said unto the House of the Rechabites, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Because ye have obeyed the Commandment of Jonadab your Father, and kept all his Precepts, and done according to all that he hath commanded you:*

*Therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab the Son of Rechab shall not want a Man to stand before me for ever.* p. 327

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## The T E X T S.

### SERMON LXXX. On the Fifteenth Sunday after TRINITY.

Jerem. xxxvi. 32. *Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah, all the words of the Book which Jeboiakim king of Judah had burnt in the fire; and there were added besides unto them many like words.* p. 339

### SERMON LXXXI. On the Sixteenth Sunday after TRINITY.

Ezek. ii. 7. *And thou shalt speak my Words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, for they are most rebellious.* p. 354

### SERMON LXXXII. On the Sixteenth Sunday after TRINITY.

Ezekiel xiii. 4. *O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts.* p. 367

### SERMON LXXXIII. On the Seventeenth Sunday after TRINITY.

Ezek. xiv. 7. *For every one of the House of Israel, or of the Stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his Idols in his Heart, and putteth the Stumbling-block of his Iniquity before his Face, and cometh to a Prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the Lord will answer him by myself.* p. 382

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## The T E X T S.

### SERMON LXXXIV. On the Seventeenth Sunday after TRINITY.

Ezekiel xviii. 31, 32. *Cast away from you all your Transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new Heart and a new Spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn your selves, and live ye.*

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### SERMON LXXXV. On the Eighteenth Sunday after TRINITY.

Ezek. xx. 24. *Because they had not executed my Judgments, but had despised my Statutes, and had polluted my Sabbaths, and their Eyes were after their Fathers Idols.*

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### SERMON LXXXVI. On the Eighteenth Sunday after TRINITY.

Ezekiel xxiv. 24. *Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to all that he hath done, shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I am the Lord God.*

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SERMON



## S E R M O N L V I I .

*On the Fourth Sunday after TRINITY.*

M O R N I N G .

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I SAMUEL xii. 16, 17.

*Now therefore stand still and see this great thing  
which the Lord will do before your eyes.*

*Is it not Wheat-harvest to day ? I will call unto the  
Lord, and he shall send Thunder and Rain ; that  
ye may perceive and see that your Wickedness is  
great, which ye have done in the sight of the  
Lord, in asking you a King.*

**T**HE History before us contains an Account of a great change of Government in *Israel* : which happened upon this occasion.

*SAMUEL* their Judge being now advanced in years (though some think not above threescore) was no longer able to bear the fatigue of travelling through the Tribes of *Israel* to administer Justice to the People. He therefore divided the Government between himself and his two Sons, *Joel* and *Abijah*. As for his own residence, he settled at his Hereditary Seat in *Ramah*, and appointed his Sons to

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reside

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reside at *Beerſheba*; whereby the Country was divided into two parts, for the greater convenience of the People: That the causes of all those who dwelt between *Dan* and Mount *Ephraim*, might be brought before *Samuel* at *Ramah*; and the causes of those between Mount *Epbraim* and *Beerſheba*, might be judged by his Sons.

B U T *Samuel's* Sons were soon found to be unfit for so great a trust: For he himself, who wrote this Book, affirms, chap. viii. 3. That they turned aside after Lucre, and took Bribes, and perverted Judgment. Whereupon some may ask, why did not God punish them as he punished the preceding Judge *Eli*, and his wicked Sons? To which I answer, That these were punished as well as their Predecessors, though not in so severe a manner; the Sons were rejected by the Elders of *Israel*, from having any farther Authority over them, and the Father had the mortification to see an end of their Government. But they were not destroyed like the other Family, because their Sin was not of so heinous and impious a nature as the others: and it is probable that their Father knew nothing of it, till this information, mentioned chap. viii. was brought before him by the Elders of *Israel*; which when he was apprised of, he consented to their being set aside, and removed from the Office which they had so much abused.

A N D this Grievance in the civil Administration prompted the *Israelites* to make an Address to *Samuel*, that he would set a King over them, after the manner of the Nations round about them.

B U T there was likewise a military reason for this demand. *Nahash*, the King or General of the *Ammo-nites*, who bordered upon *Israel*, had declared War against

against them, and began to distress them; and they concluded that none could raise an Army so effectually to oppose the *Ammonites*, and inspire the Soldiers with so much Courage to fight against them, as he that should be invested with regal Authority.

BESIDES these reasons, the *Israelites* might probably be moved to make this request, out of vanity and emulation of the grandeur of other People. They saw more Pomp and Splendor attend the Majesty of a King than the Office of a Judge. They thought themselves eclipsed by their Neighbours in this particular; and therefore they were ambitious of making as good a figure as the best, in this point of State and Dignity.

*SAMUEL* was much surprized at this Overture of the Elders: I will not undertake to guess what concern he might have for his own share in the Government: He was a Prophet as well as a Judge, i. e. a very Pious and Holy Person, and would be ready, no doubt, to do every thing that might conduce to the Felicity and Safety of his People, though it were to the lessening of himself and his Family.

BUT he was not the principal Party concerned in this change. He was sensible of that which these unthinking Elders seemed to have forgot, that God was the peculiar and immediate King of *Israel*. For this was the style and character of their Government from the beginning of *Moses* to this time, that they were the chosen People of God, and that he ruled them by his own hand and arm stretched out from Heaven; and intended in them to give a demonstration to all the World, that he was mightier than all the Gods and Kings of the Earth. Accordingly their Judges acted by his Commission, and spoke in his

name to all Earthly powers, with whom they transacted. In his name *Moses* demanded their release of *Pharaoh*; *Thus saith the Lord, Let my People go, that they may serve me*; and threatened him in the Person of God to inflict Judgments upon him in case of refusal; which were punctually accomplished, and so proved the Authority which he pleaded, to be true. In his Name *Moses* delivered the whole Law to the People; assuring them that he laid no injunctions upon them, but what he received from the mouth of God. And whenever they mutinied against *Moses* and *Aaron*, God punished them with immediate Judgments from Heaven, to convince them that they rebelled against him, in opposing his Officers who acted by his command.

LIKEWISE his leading them in their Travels, by the *Schekinah* or manifestation of his own Glory, his feeding them forty years with *Manna* from Heaven, and giving them drink out of a hard Rock in a thirsty Land, his causing not only their Enemies, but the *Red-Sea* and *Jordan* to fly, and the walls of *Jericho* to fall flat before them, and rooting out the more powerful Inhabitants of *Canaan* to give them the possession of that Land, were all convincing Arguments that the Government of *Israel* was a *Theocracy*, and that they had no other King but God alone. These things being so, it was very necessary for *Samuel*, when he had heard the demand of the People, that he should anoint a King over them, after the manner of the Nations round about them; I say, it was very necessary for him to refer this important Affair to God, who was their only King, and who alone had the Power to grant or reject this their request.

GOD

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GOD was pleased to gratifie them by giving way to their desire; but like an affronted Sovereign his grant was accompanied with Words of high resentment. ‘ Hearken to this wilful People, says he to *Samuel*, and do all that they say, and do not think yourself the greatest Sufferer by this change; for ‘ tis not you but me whom they have rejected from ‘ reigning over them.’ No wonder they desired another sort of Judge than *Samuel*; for they had chosen other Gods. And this had been their perverse humour ever since they were delivered from the Slavery of *Egypt*.

‘ BUT ere it be long (said he) they will repent, ‘ and be weary of this favour, when it is too late, and ‘ condemn their ingratitude towards me their God, ‘ and you their Prophet. However, that they may ‘ not say they wanted fair warning, declare to them ‘ at large the hardships they will bring upon themselves, by rejecting the Government of Judges of ‘ my raising up among them; and laying themselves ‘ at the Mercy of such Tyrants as rule in other Nations round about them.’

FOR this we must observe by the way, that the Eastern Monarchs then were and still are absolute Masters of the Lives and Fortunes of all their Subjects, and rule by no other Law but that of their own will and pleasure, in all things answering the character which *Samuel* gives of them; who having received full instructions from the Almighty, called the People together betimes next morning, and acquainted them, that in complyance with their request, God had commanded him to Anoint a King over them. ‘ But, says he, before I proceed, I must inform you of the nature and condition of that Go-

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verment for which you are so importunate Petitioners. Know therefore that your King will take your Children without your leave, and make of them Charioteers, Horsemen and Footmen, and dispose of them in such military Stations as he sees fit. Others he will breed up to all sorts of Handicraft Trades for his own service. A third sort he will employ in the business of his Fields and Vineyards. Your Daughters likewise he will take to be his Confectioners, Cooks and Bakers. Your Substance he will distribute among his Eunuchs, and Domesticks. In a word, you and yours shall be subject not only to one Sovereign, but to all his Favourites. Then shall ye cry to God for redress of your grievances, when these things are come upon you, but he will not hear you; but give you up to suffer the Penalty of your imprudence and ingratitude.

AFTER the Prophet had thus represented to them the thraldom they were bringing upon themselves by the change which they desired, they replied with their peculiar Obsturacy and Stiffness, as if they had heard nothing amiss; *Nay, but we will have a King over us, that we may be like all other Nations.* Strange blindness! that they could not see it was their singular Felicity, that they were not like other Nations in this particular; but had God for their King, who never failed, in time of need, to raise up men of sufficient worth and Abilities to be their Deliverers, to judge them, and to go out before them, and fight their Battles.

SAMUEL having heard the words of the People, and finding that no Arguments could divert them from their Resolution, he dismissed them for that time, with an Assurance, that he would anoint a King over

over them as soon as ever God should direct him to a proper Person. The three following Chapters contain an account of the providential designation of such Person to the regal Government, and of his anointing and entrance upon his Office. And here, in the twelfth, when the People were assembled at *Gilgal* to return God thanks for a signal Victory which he had given them over the *Ammonites*, under the conduct of their new King, *Samuel* confirms the Kingdom to him, by resigning his own and his Sons share in the civil Government.

BUT first, like a man that valued his own Reputation, and could venture the sifting of it, he challenges the whole Assembly, that if any of them could accuse him of any Fraud or Oppression in his long Government, or of taking Ox or Ass or any kind of bribe to pervert Justice and Judgment, they would stand forth and make their charge good, and they should receive immediate Satisfaction. Hereupon all the People with one voice acknowledged, that he had never wronged any of them, but had constantly governed their Nation in Holiness and Justice.

*SAMUEL* having thus received a fair acquittal and publick Testimony of his Integrity, told them, he could not do the part of a faithful Prophet and Monitor, without refreshing their Memory, on this occasion, with some short hints of the gracious and merciful dispensations of God towards them, while he was their immediate King and Governor: How, for example, he had preserved their Fathers from the time of *Jacob's* going down into *Egypt*; and when they cried to him to deliver them from the Oppression of the *Egyptians*, he sent and brought them out thence by the hand of *Moses* and *Aaron*; And since

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their settlement in the Land of *Canaan*, though by falling into Idolatry they provoked God to give them up into the hands of the *Canaanites*, *Philistines*, and *Moabites*, who tyrannized over them; yet when they cried unto him and forsook their Idols, he sent *Jerub-  
baal*, i. e. *Gideon*, and *Bedan*, i. e. *Samson*, and *Jeph-  
tha*, and *Samuel* at several times, and delivered them out of the hand of all their Enemies on every side, and caused them to dwell safely.

SO that whenever they wanted Deliverance, and by their Repentance made themselves capable of it, God never failed to raise them up sufficient Deliverers; not by human Succession or Election, but by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, in a way past their finding out; which was a full justification of the Wisdom, Power, and Goodness of God in his Government of them. And their experience had taught them, that whenever their Enemies prevailed over them, they could impute it to nothing but their forsaking of God, and worshipping of Idols.

BUT now when *Nahash* the *Ammonite* came against them, nothing would serve their turn, but they must have such a King as other Nations to reign over them. Whereby they plainly rejected the Government of God, and undervalued it as inferior to that of an earthly King.

‘ BY this revolt from God, says *Samuel*, you have provoked him to indignation against you; and that I may convince you that your Wickedness herein is very great, you shall presently see a Miracle to this purpose, which the Lord will do before your Eyes. *Is it not Wheat-harvest to day?* I will call upon the Lord, and he shall send Thunder and Rain: Which immediately followed, up-  
on

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on a short Prayer which *Samuel* put up to God for it.

NOW this Thunder and Rain was miraculous, upon two Accounts.

1st, UPON Account of the time of year when it happened; which was about the end of June or beginning of July; at which time St. *Jerom* says, no body ever saw it rain in *Judea*: And he was a good witness, for he lived many years in that Country. They had their former and latter Rain at stated times, i. e. in *Spring* and *Autumn*. But in *Summer* and *Harvest* it was a great rarity to see any Rain fall there.]

2dly, IT was Miraculous upon the account of the Day, which was serene and clear, when *Samuel* proposed to shew the People this sign of God's Anger; but no sooner did he pray for it, but the Heavens were filled with black Clouds, which brought Thunder and Rain very terrible. And this might pass for a Miracle even in these Northern Countries, where Thunder and Rain are common in Harvest. But if here, such a Holy man as *Samuel* was, should undertake so suddenly to change the day, and for so weighty a reason as his was, we should be ready enough, I believe, to own it for a Miracle, and that God spoke to us out of the Thunder.

THE *Israelites*, as insensible as they were of God's government, owned that they heard him in the Thunder, and saw him in the Lightning and Rain; at which they were so amazed, that they confessed their Sin, which they had no Conscience of before, and desired the Prophet that he would intercede with God for them, and appease his Wrath towards them; which *Samuel* with a Fatherly Affection performed: And comforted them with hopes that God would pardon them,

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them, and prosper their new Government, if in all other things they adhered to his Laws, and kept themselves from Idols.

AND now we see the reason why God was so highly offended with his People, when they petitioned for a King to reign over them. It was not because God disallows of Monarchical Government, as some Men of Republican Principles have undertaken to argue from this Place. For if there had been any moral evil in such Authority, he himself would never have consented to it, as he did more than once in this case; nor would he ever have proclaimed to the World, as he did afterwards by his Prophets, that *by him Kings reign, and Princes decree justice.* Nor would *Samuel* have given his Blessing to these Offenders, and promised that they and their King should prosper, if they would forbear to do wickedly.

THERE is no question but God allows of any just form of Government, of what denomination soever, whether the administration be in one Person or in many. But he must needs be most pleased with such a form as is most conducive to the spiritual and temporal Felicity of the People. And therefore in the two different Schemes before us, he prefers the mild administration of his Judges, whom he raised up to be deliverers of his People, and seek their Welfare, above the haughty humour of Eastern Kings, who served themselves of their Peoples Lives and Fortunes, with an Eye chiefly to their own Grandeur, Profits and Pleasures.

BUT the *Israelites* offence against God in asking an earthly King was, because hitherto they had been under his own immediate Government, and had never known any King of their Nation but himself. In which

which their case was singular, and they ought to have gloried in this Singularity, as the highest honour that could possibly have been done to them. Since they could truly say, they were in no Pain about their Judges; for whenever they wanted one, God would be sure to inspire some Man of his own chusing, with his Holy Spirit, who should come to them without their seeking, and do all that was needful to be done for them. This was their special Case: but had they been any other Nation, who had wanted a King to reign over them, they might have looke out for a Person worthy of this high Station, without any manner of offence against God.

NAY, we cannot doubt, when we read the promise God made to *Abraham*, *Gen. xvii. 16.* that Kings of People should descend from him by *Sarab* his Wife; we cannot doubt, I say, but that God in his own good time would have set a King over his People *Israel*. But then they should patiently have waited for it, till the command had proceeded out of his own Mouth; and then doubtless their regal Government should have been so defined and set out with excellent Laws, as that the commonwealth of *Israel* should have been far happier under it, than any of the Nations round about them. But now, since they will run before they are called, and provide for themselves before God's Decree is ripe for the Work, they fare accordingly. They ask to be governed by a King like the Nations round about them, and they have their Request; they have like Government and like Grievances.

THIS should teach us to see, that it is our Duty, Wisdom, and Interest to wait God's Time for the doing of those things which are most properly effect-

ed and brought about by his Providence, and not spoil good Fruit by plucking it before it is ripe, out of an over-hasty desire to gratifie an unreasonable Appetite.

WE see in the History here before us, that God may yield to our importunities and satisfie our Longings, when he is not pleased with our Requests. And therefore we are not to take every thing we obtain, as a Mark of the Divine Favour, and a merciful answer to our Prayers; but consider with what Mind we have sollicited for it, and what steps we have taken in the pursuit of it. If we are as violent as these *Israëlitæ* were, and will have no denial, but our Will must be done; we may possibly prevail, but had better have gone away empty, and left it to God to dispense to us in his own Time and Way, as he should see fit; and then we had been more happy in the enjoyment of his Dispensations.

THERE are few Men who will not readily acknowledge, that God has a right to govern the World, because he is the Maker and Lord of it; and that being infinitely Wise and Merciful, he both knows what is fit for us better than we do our selves, and will not suffer us, while we depend upon him, to want any thing that is really good for us. This is the catholick Faith of Mankind, but the Practice is quite otherwise. The far greatest part of us are as positive and resolute to carry our point in all that we desire, as these sturdy *Jews* here before us. And generally we scramble for our share, and serve our selves before our turn comes. But if we wait, and take our Portion at God's Hands, like them we are apt to despise it, and think 'tis too mean for us. These Men hastily and impiously demanded a King. God was pleased to pass over the ill-timing of their demand, and the dishonour

dishonour which was reflected upon him by it; and chose the most majestick and comely Person of all their Tribes to reign over them. But many of them, as soon as they saw him, cried out, *how shall this Man save us? and they despised him.* When we consider how many such capricious and humorous Creatures there are in all Societies of Men, great and small, we see what reason the Holy Psalmist, who likewise considered them, had to say, *God is a righteous judge, strong and patient, and God is provoked every day.* If he were not infinitely strong and patient, he could not possibly endure such unaccountable Provocations.

A NOTHER sort of People there are, who seem to be very well satisfied with what they have, and ascribe all that they possess to the bountiful Hand of God, whereas he never intended their share should be half so big as it is. I speak of those who raise themselves by indirect Ways and Means: If such ways are but commonly practised in the World, though they are plainly contrary to the ways of God, as revealed in his Word, yet they flatter themselves that they are agreeable to his Providence, and that whatever they obtain by them, is the result of his blessing and favour to them.

NOW both these sort of People do in effect, and as much as in them lies, depose God from his Government of the World, because they will not submit to carry on the business of it by those Rules which he has laid down; but as they have opportunity, they seize upon it, divide it, and use it according to their own Pleasure and Advantage.

BUT let us, who desire to approve our selves faithful Servants of Almighty God, acknowledge him to be King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, not only in our

our Words, but in our Works, by yielding a dutiful and impartial Obedience to his Holy Laws, and by procuring that his Majesty may be adored, and his name glorified, as far as our Influence, Authority, and good Example will extend.

FINALLY, Let us beseech him from whom every good and perfect Gift cometh, to counsel our Counsellors, and teach our Senators Wisdom; and so to dispose all our Hearts by the influence of his Holy Spirit, that we may be worthy Objects of his Care, and by profiting under good Government, may be entitled to the continuance and improvement of it, and may be advanced from this state of probation and discipline here below, to the more immediate Government of God himself in his own heavenly Kingdom, through the Merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, &c.





## SERMON LVIII.

*On the Fourth Sunday after TRINITY.*

EVENING.

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I SAMUEL xiii. 13, 14.

*And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee.*

**A**T the beginning of this chapter we read, that *Saul* reigned one year, and when he had reigned two years over *Israel*, he chose him three thousand men. Of which words Interpreters have given several strained and far-fetched senses. I think the meaning of the sacred Writer is plainly this, That hitherto he hath given us an account of what *Saul* did in the first year of his reign. How presently after his inauguration, he raised

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an army of three hundred and thirty thousand men, and fell upon the *Ammonites* who besieged *Jabesh-Gilead*, and delivered the *Gileadites* out of their hands. Upon which victory *Samuel* and all *Israel* assembled at *Gilgal*, where they confirmed *Saul* in the kingdom, and offered sacrifices and peace-offerings, and rejoiced greatly before the Lord.

NOW he proceeds to tell us, that out of this great army he selected three thousand of the best and bravest men, for his companions in arms, and the rest he dismissed, every man to his own home. After he had reigned two years, he began to make attempts upon those formidable enemies of *Israel* the *Philistines*, who kept garrisons in several of their Tribes, from whence they molested them, and kept them under the yoke of oppression. These garrisons *Saul* was resolved to attack; for which purpose he gave his son *Jonathan* a third part of his chosen men; with which *Jonathan* fell upon the garrison of *Geba*, in the Tribe of *Benjamin*, and destroyed it.

AS soon as the Lords of the *Philistines* heard the news of their loss, they were impatient to be revenged of the aggressors, and raised a mighty army against them, consisting of thirty thousand chariots, six thousand horse, and foot innumerable, which came and encamped at *Michmash* in *Ephraim*, not far from *Gibeat* of *Benjamin*, where *Saul* dwelt, and struck such a terror into the *Israelites*, that *they sunk into the ground*, as we say; for they hid themselves in caves, and thickets, and rocks, and high places, and pits. And some of them went to their brethren, the two Tribes and a half that dwelt on the other side *Jordan*, as giving up their Inheritance in *Canaan* for lost.

AS for King *Saul*, he was in *Gilgal*, with such men about him as had the courage to stand by him; for many of his chosen men were affected with the general consternation. In *Gilgal* he was to continue seven days by appointment between him and *Samuel*. This appointment Commentators prove from ch. x. 8. where among the Instructions which *Samuel* gave *Saul*, when he had anointed him King, he speaks thus: *Thou shalt go before me to Gilgal; and behold I will come down to thee, to offer burnt-offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace-offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do.* Accordingly we read in this xiith chapter, that *Saul* tarried in *Gilgal* seven days, as *Samuel* had appointed him. At the end of which, despairing of *Samuel*'s coming, and seeing his soldiers continually slipping away from him, he proceeded to offer a sacrifice, that he might be ready to come to an engagement with the enemy, as occasion should serve.

NOW this is what King *Saul* is blamed for here in my Text. He offered sacrifice without the company of *Samuel*; which he should not have done. And yet because he seems to give a good reason for doing so, it concerns us to look more narrowly into the circumstances of this business, that we may see what it was which made the King so great an offender.

First then, SOME think that *Saul* offered the sacrifice with his own hands, and so invaded *Samuel*'s office. But this opinion need not be admitted. For since it was the business of the Priest to offer sacrifice, and since we read, ch. xiv. that the Lord's priest *Abijah the son of Abitub, Ichabod's brother*, attended upon *Saul* about this time, we may justly suppose

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that the sacrifice was regularly and properly offered. *Saul* knew that this was the Priest's office, and would not sure take it out of his hands, when he had him in his company for that purpose.

AND tho' it be said, that *Saul* offered the burnt-offering, yet it does not follow from hence, that he sacrificed with his own hands. For so *David* and *Solomon*, and a great many more, are said to have built altars, and slain sheep and oxen, and offered incense; but the meaning is, that these things were done at their command; the Priests were the ordinary sacrificers, tho' the Prophets offered in extraordinary cases.

2dly, SOME Interpreters think that *Saul* mistook *Samuel*'s appointment of this sacrifice, in respect of the time which he limited for it. And to make this out, they refer us to the tenth chapter of this book, which gives an account how *Samuel* anointed *Saul* to be King, and presently foretold him of several occurrences which should happen in his way, as soon as he was gone, by which he might rest satisfied that *Samuel* was a Prophet of God, and followest his direction in what he had now done. And then he parts with him with this Appointment; *Thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal, and behold, I will come down to thee, to offer burnt-offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace-offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do.* This is our sense of this appointment; and thus *Saul* understood it. But these Interpreters, by altering a pause in the reading of these words, make them differ much in point of time, thus: *Go before me to Gilgal, and I will come to thee, to offer burnt-offerings and peace-offerings seven days: Be sure to tarry there till I come, and then I will shew*

shew thee how to proceed farther. Now this way of reading and pronouncing the words makes *Samuel* to say, that they would spend seyen days in their sacrifices; whereas, in the other way, they direct *Saul* to tarry seyen days before the sacrifices began. *Saul* understood the words in the other sense, as plainly appears by his answer just before my Text. If he mistook the meaning of them, then he sinned ignorantly, and might not deserve such a severe sentence as is here passed upon him. For he thought he had fulfilled the Prophet's injunction, when he had waited seyen days for him.

3dly, OTHERS therefore are persuaded, that *Saul* understood *Samuel* very well, but that in truth he did not tarry out the full time. I confess it is expressly asserted in the context, that *Saul* did tarry seyen days, according to the set time which *Samuel* had appointed; and yet I cannot but favour their conjecture, who think that he sacrificed before the seventh day was ended: or at least before the eighth day was far enough advanced for *Samuel*'s coming to him. He was either too early or too late in the day: too early, if the Prophet proposed to have sacrificed the same day that he came to *Gilgal*; and too late, if he meant to repose himself that night, and offer on the morrow. However it was, I doubt not but the day of their meeting was fixed, and well understood by both parties; for an involuntary mistake could not have proved so provoking to God, and so penal to the offender, as we find this proved in the consequences of it.

NOW let us see what may be said on both sides of this case: What reason *Saul* had to anticipate the time of sacrificing, and how just it was in *Samuel* to pronounce such a sentence upon this anticipation.

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*SAUL* was a young King, in the flower both of his age, and his reign. He had been anointed for this very purpose, that he might most effectually raise the armies of *Israel*, and lead them out gallantly, and render them terrible to their enemies. He had wrought a great deliverance for them against the *Ammonites*, for which he had the praises of God and men. *Samuel* and all *Israel* went to *Gilgal*, and feasted and sacrificed, with great joy that they had such a King for their leader. This animated him with a desire of winning greater praise, by breaking the power of the *Philistines*, whose garrisons he began to ruin. Whereupon they took the alarm. They considered that this new King might set a new edge upon the spirits and arms of *Israel*, and therefore resolving to crush him in the bud, they brought the whole weight of their forces upon him.

*SAUL* was now in *Gilgal*, where he waited with impatience for the coming of *Samuel*. Seven days seemed to him as seven years. He saw the enemy ravaging his Country, while his own men, instead of gathering about him, were daily decreasing for want of action. In order therefore to have his hands at liberty, he performed his devotions and offered his sacrifice, that he might be prepared to deal with his enemies whenever they should assault him. This is what he says in his apology for sacrificing; *I saw the enemy advancing, and my own people decreasing; and I said, The Philistines will come upon me before I have made my supplication to the Lord. I forced my self therefore, and offered a burnt-offering.*

ALL this looks well on the side of *Saul*. Here was a fair appearance of zeal for God and his People. He was eager to perform his duty to both: and I doubt

doubt not but it stirs the indignation of some, especially military men, to hear that such a brave spirit was cramped and kept back from action by the delays of the Prophet.

BUT then, to justify the Prophet, it is enough to say, that he was the mouth of God to the King, and had no will or humour of his own to serve, but regulated his proceedings as he was moved by the divine Spirit. Of which he had given *Saul* ample demonstrations. For when he advanced him to the kingdom, he assured him that he was directed to him by immediate revelation, and all the People were so sensible of the hand of God in it, that they called him, *the Lord's Anointed*.

IF we consider *Samuel's* general character, we shall find that from twelve years old to this very time, he was reverenced by all *Israel* as a Prophet of God, appointed to direct their affairs by immediate revelation. Under his ministry they were successful both in peace and war. He had such power with God, that he failed not to obtain help from Heaven in difficult cases. In his administration he had no ambitious or covetous views for himself or his children, as he freely declared to all *Israel* before their new King, and appealed to them to accuse him of any such designs if they could; and they fully acquitted him. And this character he maintained throughout his transactions with *Saul*; for he plainly warned him from God of the penalties which he incurred by the wrong steps which he took; and when he was forced to leave him, as a man deaf to all his counsels, yet he ceased not to mourn and pray for him to the last. Which shows that he usurped no authority over King *Saul*, nor indulged any perverse humour or grudge against him,

but honestly advised him for the best in every thing, just as he received commandment from God. Thus much *Saul* fairly confessed, when after the decease of *Samuel*, he applied to the Witch of *Endor* to bring him again from the other World; which he would never have done, if he had not esteemed him his best Counsellor, and the only man of all his People, who could inform him of the mind of God.

To this character of *Samuel* we must add the ancient method of divine Providence, continued in governing *Israel* at that time. For tho' he had raised up a King to reign over them, yet this King was not to act in extraordinary cases, without a message and direction from God by the mouth of his Prophet. The history of the Kings of *Israel* and *Judah*, from this time to the captivity of *Babylon*, abounds with instances of Prophets sent upon great occasions to tell these Kings what God would have them to do. And if the King despised the Prophet, the history assures us, that he sadly suffered for his contempt: because it was not man who was slighted, but God. For God ever asserted to himself the supremacy over *Israel*, and let their Kings know, that they were but his Deputies, and reigned by his authority, and for the fulfilling of his will and pleasure; which when they failed to do, he sent his Prophets to admonish them of their error, and these admonitions were delivered in such a style, as if God himself had been the Speaker. And he was so far acknowledged to be so, that in all grievous calamities, it was one part of the publick confession of the Church, when they humbled themselves before God, that they had not hearkened to the voice of his commandments, which he had spoken to them by his servants the prophets.

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THIS brings us to see the sin of *Saul* in the case before us. He had received a command from God at the time of his Inauguration, to tarry at *Gilgal* till the Prophet should come thither, and bring him instructions from above what to do. *Samuel* had appointed to be with him in seven days, and it is supposed that he kept to his appointment; for *Saul* had offered but part of the sacrifice when he came. We do not see the reason why he tarried seven days, but no doubt there was a good reason for it; and if he had tarried longer, *Saul* should have deferred the sacrifice till he had seen him, because he was to hear from him, upon that occasion, what God would have him to do.

'BUT, says *Saul*, the Army of the *Philistines* was advanced as near me as *Michmash*, and I was apprehensive they would fall upon me before I had performed my devotions.' This carries a plausible appearance, but at the bottom it is no more but his setting up his own discretion and conduct against the positive command of God; and is the very same thing as if a subordinate officer in an army should engage the enemy contrary to the orders of his General. For this notion we must always carry along with us, that God was Governor in chief of the affairs of *Israel*, and gave out orders by his Prophets, as I have proved; and *Saul* had nothing to fear from the *Philistines*, so long as he obeyed these orders. To prove this, we need but turn back to the viith chapter of this book. There we read how an army of the *Philistines* came up to fight with *Israel* at *Mizpeh*, when this very Prophet *Samuel* was their Judge. To him the *Israelites* applied for help, and he applied to God by sacrifice and prayer: and the Lord heard

him, and thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the *Philistines*, so that they presently fell before *Israel*, who pursued them and obtained such a victory over them, that they came no more into their coasts during the government of *Samuel*. And besides keeping the peace with them, they restored them many cities which they had formerly taken from them.

THIS should have satisfied *Saul*, (for he must needs have heard of it) that he was safe from the *Philistines*, so long as he obeyed the command of God. And it might likewise take off the force of his other pretence for sacrificing, that his People could not be held together for want of action. For what could all *Israel* avail without the help of God? and with his blessing how few were sufficient for the battle? As *Jonathan*, *Saul*'s son, declares in this very case: for says he presently to his armour-bearer, ch. xiv. *the Lord is under no restraint, to save by many or by few*. And in this Faith these two fell upon a garrison of the *Philistines*, and begun such a slaughter among them, as ended in a great victory.

3dly, AS to *Saul*'s pretended piety in making supplication to God before he came to an engagement, I ask, What it was that he prayed for? He had reason to be persuaded, and I believe he actually was so, that it was God's will and pleasure he should perform his devotion in the company of his Prophet. And therefore to go to prayers without him, was in effect to pray that God would prosper *Israel* out of his own way, and in breach of his own word; and it implied that *Saul* thought there was no occasion for that farther direction from God, which he was expressly commanded to wait for. Now to seek to God to prosper

prosper any undertaking, in a way which is contrary to his own clear revelation, is so far from deserving the name of Piety, that it is the greatest affront which can be put upon infinite Wisdom. Such devotions are much better omitted than performed, and obedience to a plain injunction of God, is much to be preferred before such sacrifice.

THUS I have shown the reasons which *Saul* had to believe the word of the Prophet to be the word of God, and the obligations he lay under to obey it, and the weakness of his pretences for breaking thro' it. From all which I conclude, that the sentence in my Text, which at first sight may seem harsh, is just, reasonable, and indeed unavoidable. For the premises being admitted, every one must pronounce that *Saul* acted foolishly and impolitickly in not observing what was enjoyned him. For this was a touchstone of his Faith towards God, which if it had proved genuine, he would have been established in his kingdom for ever. But thus wilfully rejecting the word of his supreme Lord, he discovered too much of the libertine in him to make the divine Will the rule of his government. For which prevarication he was doomed to be set aside, and another substituted in his room, who would do it effectually, according to God's own heart.

IN this sentence it is questioned how those words could have been made good, that *Saul* and his children should have been Kings of *Israel* for ever, in case he had obeyed. For according to the prophecy of *Jacob*, the scepter was to be in *Judah*, whereas *Saul* was of the Tribe of *Benjamin*. This is easily answered, by saying (that which is very true) that God no other-

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otherwise decrees to bless men, but upon condition of their faith and obedience: which condition is sometimes expressed, but always to be understood in the divine Promises. And when it is not performed on our part, the obligation on God's part ceases, as is very clear in *Eli's* case, mentioned ch. ii. 30. of this book. But suppose *Saul* had stood firm in his obedience, what had become of the house of *David*, for whom the scepter was decreed? How could both families have reigned? I answer, by a division of the Tribes into two kingdoms, as it afterwards happened. Tho' this is a supposition which need not be made. The difficulty is solved by the fore-knowledge of God, who revealed it to *Jacob*, that the reigning family should be, and continue to be of the Tribe of *Judah*; and yet *Samuel* might truly say, that *Saul* had lost the kingdom only by his disobedience, which God in his Omnipotence foresaw that he would do.

NOW to apply this particular case to a general use: That which the Prophet says to *Saul*, he says to all mankind; whosoever transgresses any righteous law, or rule of religion or virtue, thinking to find his pleasure or profit in such transgression; or walks unrestrained in the ways of the World, and the desires of his own heart, will find in the end that he has been acting a foolish part, building upon a rotten foundation, forfeiting all valuable enjoyments, deluded with a shadow of advantages, and entangled in the briers and thorns of real, inextricable dangers and calamities.

THIS conduct *Samuel* pronounces to be folly, and the fate of *Saul* has justified his sentence; and yet such folly is the applauded and modish wisdom of this World;

World; and a man would be hardly thought fit to live in it, or to carry on the affairs of it, who could not upon various occasions step out of the bounds of religion and plain truth to serve himself or his friends.

WHAT censures, what outrageous reflections upon the ways of God, would such a scene as that in this chapter have occasioned, had it been acted amongst us? To see a young Prince, almost in the mouth of a powerful enemy, eager to give proofs of his valour, but having his hands tyed up by an old Prophet, on a religious account! I fear his companions in arms would have been hastier than *Saul*, and have clamoured him out of his patience before half seven days were ended, and thrown a load of blasphemies upon the sacred Injunction, tho' authorized with divine credentials. But then I speak of an age wherein true piety is shrunk into a very narrow compass; an age which swarms with blasphemers and scoffers more numerous than the *Philistines*, more noisom than the *Egyptian* plague of frogs; for like them they come into our houses and secret chambers, and to much worse purpose, poisoning the religious and moral Principles of too many about us. But in old *Greece* and *Rome* it was not so: they honoured their Gods, which yet were no Gods. They were right in their intention, though mistaken in the object of their worship. *Inauspicious* with them was the same with *unfortunate*: *i. e.* they never expected a good issue of a business, which was enterprised contrary to the warnings of their *Divines*: But in their grand affairs, especially at the beginning of a war, they waited till their Gods had signified their approbation, by sacrifice, augury, or some other way. Whosoever despised the *Omens*, was looked

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ed upon as very unfit to be trusted with the publick safety. He was reprobated with loud detestations; or if employed, proved unfortunate: Of which there are some examples in history. But I hasten to a conclusion, which I will draw from the latter part of my Text. *The Lord, says Samuel, hath sought him a man after his own heart, whom he hath appointed to be the captain of his people.* This man was *David*; who answered this character so well, that there are but two exceptions upon record against him, *viz.* his injuring of *Uriah*, and his numbering the People; which he attoned for by a speedy repentance. In all other particulars he is allowed, upon a review of his life, to have approved himself as here described. And since he was a great Prophet as well as a King, we cannot end better, than by hearing some of his sentiments and maxims of government.

1<sup>st</sup>, AS to Wisdom, he assures us, that the fear of God is the first and fundamental principle of all good policy. 2<sup>dly</sup>, For Power, he confesses in abundance of places, that it belongeth only to God. 3<sup>dly</sup>, For Strength; ‘ I will not trust in my bow, neither is it my sword that shall help me: but it is God that sa-  
‘ veth me from mine enemies, and puts them to flight  
‘ that rise up against me.’ 4<sup>thly</sup>, For Alliances:  
‘ Trust not in men, nor in any child of man, for vain  
‘ is their help. It is better to trust in the Lord, than  
‘ to put any confidence in Princes. 5<sup>thly</sup>, For Coun-  
sel; ‘ The counsel of the Lord shall endure for ever:  
‘ as for that of the Heathen, he bringeth it to nought:  
‘ he maketh the devices of the People to be of none  
‘ effect, and casteth out the counsels of Princes. 6<sup>thly</sup>,  
For Courage and presence of mind in the day of bat-  
tle; ‘ He teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers  
to

‘ to fight. The Lord is on my side, I will not fear  
‘ what man can do against me. Tho’ an host should  
‘ encamp against me, my heart shall not fear : I will  
‘ not cast away my confidence, whatever forces shall  
‘ be brought against me.’ *Lastly*, (for we must be  
content with a taste of this great King’s numerous  
Aphorisms) He declares that he always found it most  
for his interest and safety, to abide stedfastly by the  
Will of God, and that in waiting upon him his pa-  
tience was always well rewarded.

FROM all this it appears, that *David* was indeed  
a man after God’s own heart : and that *Saul*, by trans-  
gressing the divine Command in the instance before  
us, fullied that character of a politick and stout man,  
which he seemed most to aim at. For it had been his  
greatest wisdom to sit still, till God had allowed and  
directed him to enter upon action ; and to have de-  
spised the insults of his enemies, would have argued a  
braver mind, than to be provoked by them to break  
the Commandment of God.

LET this teach us to hold out against all tem-  
tations whatever, in pursuance of our duty to God :  
not to be frightned by dangers and difficulties, nor  
allured by seeming advantages, to break thro’ the  
bounds which he hath set us. For tho’ his Laws  
may seem to bind us hand and foot, and expose us  
a prey to our enemies, yet his good Providence  
will work out our deliverance, and bring us to a happy  
issue, if we will but follow it. *Keep innocence, and*  
*take heed to the thing that is right, for that shall bring a*  
*man peace at the last.* The observance of this rule  
would make us a happy World, and without it we  
shall always be miserable.

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LET us therefore beseech God to incline the hearts of all who profess and call themselves Christians, to be sincere doers of his Will, according as it is revealed in the holy Gospel; in doing of which we shall be sure to find great reward, even the blessings of this life and of that which is to come, through the merits of the author and finisher of our Faith, Jesus Christ our Lord: To whom, &c.



SERMON



# SERMON LIX.

*On the Fifth Sunday after TRINITY.*

MORNING.

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1 SAMUEL xv. 22.

*And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in Burnt-offerings and Sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than Sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of Rams.*



E have lately seen how the People of *Y*rael offended God by rejecting his Government of them, and demanding a King after the fashion of the Nations round about them: We shall now see how the King which God gave them, displeased him, by not punctually fulfilling his word, in a matter which he commanded him to execute.

FOR though Kings have the supreme authority among Men, yet God, who is higher than the Highest, reigns over all, and did not abandon the care of his People, nor cease to direct them in their affairs, when he set up *Saul* at the Head of them: But he covenanted

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covenanted with this Sovereign Prince to bless him and to prosper him, upon condition that he would always obey the Divine Will, which should be communicated to him either by his established Law contained in the writings of *Moses*, or by new Revelations and Messages which he would send him by his Prophets, or by the Oracle of the Sanctuary, which, in failure of the two former, the Priest should consult for him.

NOW here we are informed in the History before us, how God sent the Prophet *Samuel* to *Saul*, commanding him to levy War against the *Amalekites*, who had given this occasion for it. They were a branch of the *Edomites*, *Amalek* their founder being descended from the eldest Son of *Esau*, as we read *Genesius* xxxvi. and consequently they inhabited part of *Idumæa* by the wilderness of *Paran*, near the way by which *Israel* came out of *Egypt*.

AND in the second month of their coming out of *Egypt*, when they were in hard circumstances, as being in a barren Wilderness, and Strangers in it, these *Amalekites* gathered a great Army, and came out of their own Territory, and fell suddenly upon the poor *Israelites*, at a place called *Rephidim*, attacking them chiefly in the rear, and slaying such as through faintness and weakness could not keep up with the main body of the People. But *Israel*, by the prayers of *Moses* their Prophet, and the valiant conduct of *Joshua* their Captain, obtained a compleat victory over them.

OF this Battel God commands *Moses* to make a particular Record, *Exod.* xvii. 14. declaring with an Oath that he would have continual War with the *Amalekites*, until in process of time their name should be

be utterly rooted out from under Heaven. This sentence is repeated and enforced, *Deut. xxv. 17.* And the justice of it is vindicated by these Reasons.

1. BECAUSE the *Amalekites* were the first that drew sword against *Israel*; and that unprovoked; for the *Israelites* did not offer to pass through their Country, and consequently gave them no apprehensions of an Invasion: And that which made it more barbarous to assault them at this time, was, that they were but just delivered from grievous oppression, and had not yet been accustomed to war. 2. The *Amalekites* were not only causeless aggressors, but they invaded *Israel* by treachery and surprize, without any notice or declaration of war. 3. They did not offer *Israel* fair battle, but fell upon them like wild beasts, cutting off such as through feebleness or accident were separated from their company, and in no condition to resist them. 4. By this outrage they shewed their great contempt of God, who had done such wonderful things for *Israel* in *Egypt*, and brought them thence with a mighty hand, and overthrew *Pharaoh* in the Red-Sea when he pursued them. These and many more instances of the Divine Favour towards *Israel*, *Amalek* must needs have heard of, together with what God farther intended to do for them; and therefore their assaulting them in their first setting out for *Canaan*, and second month of deliverance from *Egypt*, was a hardy defiance of their Divine Guide and Protector.

WE see that *Amalek*, out of meer malice, and even in despight of God, attempted to cut off *Israel* root and branch; and therefore it was but just with God, their King, to have war with the *Amalekites* 'till he had destroyed them, and

THIS was the ground of God's commission to *Saul*, *Go, says he, and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not: But slay both Man and Woman, Infant and Suckling, Ox and Sheep, Camel and Ass.* All this *Saul* undertook to perform, and raising an Army of two hundred and ten thousand Soldiers, he made a sudden descent upon *Amalek*, and partly by Sieges, partly by pitch'd Battles, in a short time he destroyed their whole Country. But being too much a *Libertine* in his Principles of Religion, and not scrupling to change the Sacred Text with his own Comment upon it, his fancy led him to spare *Agag* the King of the *Amalekites*; his example herein was quickly followed by the Soldiers, who made Prey of the Enemies fattest Cattle, and richest Goods, and burnt only those things which were of smallest value.

BUT God was highly displeased, that both King and People had so shamefully transgressed that Law which he had so solemnly enacted many hundred years before, and so express a Message which he sent by *Samuel* for the present execution of it. And indeed his displeasure is very just. For even earthly Kings and Commanders will not endure, that those who are under their Authority, should use their own pleasure in the execution of their Orders. This very King *Saul*, but a little before this, would have put his brave Son *Jonathan* to death, had not the Army withstood it, only for tasting a little Honey contrary to the royal command, which *Jonathan* had never heard of, and therefore was not properly an Offender against it.

BEHOLD

BEHOLD here the Pride and Impiety of man's Heart; full of resentment, if his own unreasonable Will be not done in all things; and quite negligent and forgetful of the holy Will of God. Whereby he plainly honours himself far above his Maker, and arrogates to himself a far greater share in the Government of the World. Every one, he expects, should pay a deference and regard to his Word, when at the same time he pays little or no reverence to that of the most High.

FOR this cause God told the Prophet *Samuel*, that he repented he had made *Saul* King, considering how little he hearkened to God, and how much he governed himself by his own Lusts. When *Samuel* heard this, he was much troubled, and spent a whole night in Prayer to God, that he would turn from the fierceness of his Wrath, and be favourable to King *Saul*: But God, who knew this King's Heart, declared that he was not worthy of his Grace and Favour.

FOR of the fault which he had now committed, he seems to have no manner of Sense nor Conscience. When *Samuel* next morning waited on him at *Gilgal*, *Saul* told him with the greatest assurance, that he had performed the Commandment of the Lord; and when *Samuel* asked *what meant the bleating of Sheep and lowing of Oxen about him?* he answered, unconcerned, *we spared them out of the best of the Amalekites Flocks and Herds, for a Sacrifice to the Lord thy God*; as if the destruction of these had been no part of his Commission, though they were devoted with words as express as any of the rest.

‘Sir, said the Prophet, pray give me leave to tell you, what God said to me this night.’ Leave being

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granted, he proceeded thus. ‘ When you were obscure and inconsiderable, even in your own esteem, ‘ God raised you to be King of *Israel*, which was a ‘ noble demonstration of his regard for you, and ‘ should have obliged you to an exact performance ‘ of all his Commands. Why then did you not destroy all that belonged to *Amalek*, as you were ordered to do? ‘ I have,’ said the King, ‘ done my part; ‘ but the People would reserve a Sacrifice out of the ‘ things which should have been destroyed.’ This was but a mean excuse, to lay the fault upon the Soldiers, who were under his command, and durst not have disobeyed his Orders: And though afterwards he says he was afraid of restraining them from taking the Spoil, yet it is plain from the History that he authorized them to do it by his own Example; and it seems he never intended to do otherwise, as being persuaded that his good intention would more than atone for the Offence, and that these Spoils would be sanctified by offering to God a plentiful Sacrifice out of them.

THE Prophet saw that this was his meaning, and hereupon took occasion to assure him, that he very much mistook the Will and Pleasure of the Almighty. *For hath the Lord, said he, as great delight in Burnt-Offerings and Sacrifices, as in Obeying his Voice?* ‘ You cannot think so, whatever you may pretend: ‘ Since no Service can be acceptable to him, which ‘ is performed in contradiction to his express Will. ‘ The Sacrifice that is obtained by the breach of any ‘ one of God’s Laws, though never so rich and sumptuous, is an abomination to him. Know therefore ‘ that you have incurred his high Displeasure, by ‘ bringing these Spoils before him. For how can ‘ you

you think he will regard these Sacrifices with a gracious Eye, which consist of such things as he himself had doomed to be burnt in the Enemies Country, without being carried any farther? When you burn these upon his Altar, you tell him, that you have mended the instructions which he gave you, and that you have acted more wisely and profitably by saving these rich Spoils for a Sacrifice, than if you had strictly fulfilled his word, and consumed these with other things of small value. herein you have contradicted good sense and reason, which would have told you, *That Obedience is better than Sacrifice*, and a strict performance of God's word more pleasing to him than the fat of Rams.

THIS Assertion of the Prophet *Samuel*, of the preference of Obedience above Sacrifice, is ratified and confirmed by the unanimous Suffrage of the wisest and best of men.

1st, *ASAPH*, Psalm 1. 13, 14. introduces God saying to men, *Will I eat the flesh of Bulls, or drink the blood of Goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble; so will I deliver thee, and thou shalt glorifie me.* And in the following Psalm, *David* praying to God for the pardon of his Sins in the case of *Uriah*, he says: *Thou desirest not Sacrifice, else would I give it: But thou delightest not in Burnt-Offering. The Sacrifices of God are a broken Spirit; a broken and a contrite Heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.* 2dly, His Son and Successor *Solomon* observes, *Prov. xxi. 3.* that *to do Justice and Judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than Sacrifice.* 3dly, *Isaiah i. and lxvi.* represents God as utterly abhorring the Sacrifices of the wicked *Jews*, while their manners were impure,

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and odious to him. And 4thly, in *Jeremiah vii. 22.* God tells them; *I commanded not your Fathers in the day that I brought them out of Egypt concerning Burnt-Offerings or Sacrifices: But this thing I commanded them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my People.* 5thly, *Hosea vi. 6.* *I desired Mercy and not Sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than Burnt-Offering.* 6thly, *Mic. vi. 7.* *Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of Rams &c. He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what he requires, viz. To do justly, and love Mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.*

AND this may suffice to shew how the Sacred Writers agree in their sayings to support this Maxim, which was first pronounced by *Samuel*, as a general rule of Divine Worship, that God delights in the Obedience of his Servants more than in their Sacrifices.

*SAMUEL*'s saying, I confess, may be restrained to this Fact of *Saul* which occasioned it, that whereas he had saved the Spoil which he should have destroyed, and thought it might be better expended in a Sacrifice, he was very much mistaken in doing as he did, having no Authority to make such Commutation: For God had not required this Sacrifice at his hand, but on the contrary had enjoyn'd him to consume the matter of it as a Prophane thing. But this might be said, without depreciating those Sacrifices which were instituted by Divine Authority in the *Mosaick Law*, and were thereby made part of the Religious Worship of the *Israelites*, and consequently any neglect or contempt of them had been an act of Disobedience.

HOWEVER, those Sentences which I have quoted out of the Psalms and the Prophets, plainly declare,

declare, that upon the comparison, *Obedience is better than these Sacrifices*; if by Obedience we understand, as we very justly may, the pious Affections and Actions of the Worshipper, and by Sacrifices the external Rites and Ceremonies of Religion.

THAT Sacrifices of God's instituting, were acceptable to him, when rightly offered, appears from the reasons and ends of their Institution; but so, as that it appears at the same time, that it was not for any intrinsick Virtue in themselves, but for the Piety and Virtue of the Offerer, that they were an acceptable and laudable part of Religion.

AND therefore we are not to interpret this of *Samuel*, or any of the Texts abovementioned, as if Sacrifices under the *Mosaick Dispensation* were things prohibited, and displeasing to God; that's impossible, for he ordained them; but they were not to be esteemed as the chief parts of Religion; they were but subservient to Piety and Virtue, for the furthering of which alone they were instituted, and not for any Merit or Holiness in themselves. If those who offered them, made such account of them, as to neglect the weightier points of the Law, Justice and Mercy, and the Love of God, which was the common delusion of the infatuated *Jews*, God declaimed against them by his Prophets, and thrust them from his Altar, assuring them, that while their Hearts were impure, their Sacrifices were an Abomination to him.

SACRIFICES were instituted as helps to Divine Worship, but not such necessary conditions of it, as that a Man could not worship God acceptably without them; for in *Israel* the offering was confined to one Place, even to the Temple at *Jerusalem*, to which many good People could not possibly re-

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sort at the stated times, who were either in foreign Countries, or disabled to travel by Sickness or other accidents. In such cases we cannot doubt but God accepted of the pure and pious Devotions of their Hearts, without these external Oblations.

THE forecited passages fully justify this Opinion; and one of them particularly in *Jer. vii. 22.* where he tells his People, that *in the day when he brought their Fathers out of Egypt, he commanded them nothing concerning Burnt-offerings or Sacrifices, but only to obey his Voice, and walk in his ways.* This Text must be carefully interpreted as to the time it denotes; otherwise it may seem to contradict the whole Levitical Law; for it is certain that God gave that Law to *Israel* during the time of their Travels from *Egypt* to *Canaan*; but it is as certain, that at the time here spoken of by *Jeremiah*, i. e. at that juncture when he delivered them from their *Egyptian Slavery*, he had not given them any commands or directions about Sacrificing. And the force of the Prophet's Argument here, to prove Obedience better than Sacrifice, is this; that seeing God was pleased to own *Israel* in *Egypt* for his People, before he had given them the Law of Sacrifices, and only upon condition that they should keep themselves from Idols, and serve him as their God, this proves that this kind of Obedience has the precedence of Sacrifice, and is more essential to true Religion.

AND therefore it was an ill-grounded determination which some Jews in our Saviour's time had made upon that Question, commonly debated in their Schools, *Which is the first and great Commandment*, that the command of sacrificing was the greatest. Their Ancestors indeed were apt

to run into this Notion, as we find by what we have seen in the Prophets to this purpose. But our Lord corrects them, when this question was put to him, by answering, *That the Love of God was the first Commandment, and the Love of our Neighbour the next to it, and that on these two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.* And in this resolution he was justified by one of the Scribes who heard him, and cried, *It is well spoken. For to love the Lord our God with all our Heart, and Soul, and Strength, and Mind, and our Neighbour as our selves, is more than all Burnt-Offerings and Sacrifices.* To which if we add what the Jews say in their comment upon that of Hosea, *I will have Mercy and not Sacrifice,* that acts of beneficence are more pleasing to God than all the Oblations which the Israelites offer upon his Altar, we may conclude, that many of the Jews, in their most corrupt State, held it better to worship God in Spirit and in Truth, than to neglect the Heart, and abound in the outward rites of Religion.

THE reason of this is so plain, that the very *Pagans* could not help seeing it, through all the thick Clouds of their Idolatry. The more considerate of their Philosophers and learned Men, observing how profuse many People were in offering Sacrifice, who were polluted with many detestable Crimes, and still persisted in them, declared in their Discourses and Writings, that their Gods were not pleased with such Sacrifices, but would much rather have more honesty, and less expence in their Worship. 'Tis a precept of Menander the ancient Greek Poet; *When you Sacrifice to God, says he, bring an honest Mind; and do not put on the white Garment for that purpose, before your Affections and Manners bear some correspondence to it.* So-

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crates used to say, *That the Gods, who wanted not the goods of Men, had more regard to the Affections than the Riches of their Worshippers.* For since the worst of Men are oftentimes the wealthiest, it would be in vain to serve the Gods, if the rich Man by his Present could carry his cause against the Poor. *Tully*, in his second Book of the Nature of the Gods, teaches, *that we then perform the best and most grateful service to them, when we worship them with a pure, upright, incorrupt, and sanctified Heart and Tongue.* *Porphyry* in his second Book against the eating of Animals, has this passage among many others to the like purpose, *The surest way, says he, for any Man to become temperate, pious and just, is to be persuaded, that the Gods stand in no need of his Sacrifices, but have great regard to the frame of his Mind; and if he has most worthy Sentiments of them, they esteem that the best Sacrifice.* And to add one more Testimony, *Seneca*, as quoted by *Lactantius*, speaks thus, *Would you conceive the Majesty of the great God to be placable and gentle, full of loving-kindness, and always ready to do good? You must then imagine him to be pleased in his Worship, not so much with the Blood of Sacrifices, as with a pure Mind, and an honest Intention.*

THERE are many other passages of like importance in the learned Gentile Philosophers and Poets; but these are enough to shew how exactly they concur with Sacred Writ, in preferring Obedience before Sacrifice.

NOTHING of all this is intended to derogate from the suitableness of Sacrifices, while their institution lasted, or of any present Ceremony or Observance, which may contribute to the solemnity and improvement of divine Worship. God knows that the Majesty of Religion cannot well be exhibited to the

the Eyes of Men, without the advantage of some external Ornaments to beautifie and recommend it; and therefore he found out and prescribed such Ornaments in his Worship of old. All the danger is, lest Men should so far rest in these things, as to persuade themselves that to be punctual in them is Religion enough, and so take no care that their Heart be right, and their Conversation agreeable to the Will of God. It appears, from what we have quoted on this Occasion, that both *Jews* and *Gentiles* were extremely prone to fall into this fatal Mistake, as finding it much more easie to put on a cloke and form of Religion, in some acts of Devotion, than to admit the Spirit of it in their Hearts, and its Laws in their Lives and Conversations. Which is the reason why the forementioned Writers abound with so many Admonitions to preserve Men from running into this pernicious Error.

BUT the special Lesson which we are to learn from the Miscarriage of *Saul*, I take to be this; that we do not indulge a licentious humour in interpreting the Word of God; but take it in the most natural and obvious Meaning which it offers to our Understandings. This is the safest way of interpreting any Law; and the Laws of God, which concern us in our respective Callings and Stations, are conceived in such Words as we may easily understand them, and must be very perverse and froward, if we will not pursue the true intent and meaning of them.

WHAT could make this Commission to *Saul* more plain, than the words in which it was delivered to him by *Samuel*? Whereby he is charged, not to spare so much as an Ox or a Sheep of *Amalek*, but utterly to destroy them all. Yet he was such a Libertine in his Notions, as to think he did right, in bringing

whole

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whole droves of them to *Gilgal*. For he considered they would quickly be destroyed in Sacrifice; and he thought this was a much better way of destroying them, than to make no use of them at all. And in this he was so confident that he had fulfilled the command of God, that he triumphed in it, and the Prophet had much ado to convince him that he had failed.

THIS shews us how easie it is for us, but how horrible at the same time, to pervert the Word of God, when we do not mightily relish the plain Construction of it, but will needs interpret it according to our own loose and free way of thinking, till we make it comply with our own carnal Ends and Affections. I hardly know of any Sin more common, than this audacious freedom which Men take with the Sacred Word of God: But how offensive it is to the most High, and how penal to the Offenders, we may learn from the doom and sentence which was passed upon King *Saul* for so doing.

ONE of the Woes which our Saviour denounced against the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, was for this, that *they had made the Word of God of none effect*, i. e. they had interpreted away the genuine Sense, the Mind of God in it, by their Traditions and false glosses upon it. How many such *Scribes* and *Pharisees* would Christ find to reprove in Christendom, were he now personally amongst us? With this aggravation of our Guilt, that while we are condemning them, we ourselves are doing the same thing.

LET us learn at last to deal sincerely with God and our own Souls. Let us believe that he will judge us according to his, and not according to our own Gospel, as we make it by our perverse Construction of

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it. And as we would escape the punishment of Hypocrites and Dissemblers with him at the last Day, let us receive his Laws in their just force and meaning, and perform all the duties which they enjoyn us, with that Frequency, Care, and Sincerity, that we may not be afraid or ashamed that our Works should follow us, and be weighed in the balance of the Sanctuary, and prove that we have not laboured in vain in the duties which our Saviour Jesus Christ has given us to do. To him, &c.





## SERMON LX.

*On the Fifth Sunday after TRINITY.*

E V E N I N G.

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I SAM. xvii. 50.

*So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine and slew him.*

**A**FTER the Philistines had lost the Battle of *Michmas*, related in the thirteenth and fourteenth Chapters, they were glad to be quiet for a while, and take time to recruit their shattered forces: but when they heard that King *Saul* had not obeyed the divine orders in his expedition against the *Amalekites*, and that the Prophet *Samuel* had withdrawn himself from his Court and Councils, and that thereupon the King was grown very much disordered in his mind; they took courage from these divisions in *Israel*, to renew the war. Accordingly they raised an army, and invaded the borders of the Tribe of *Judah*, and sat down near the valley of *Elah*.

THIS

THIS alarmed Saul and the men of *Israel*, who were quickly up in arms to oppose their progress, and came up with them at the place aforesaid, and pitched their camp on the other side of the valley.

IN this posture the two armies continued forty days, facing one another, without doing any thing considerable. That which hindered them from coming to a general Engagement was this. The *Philistines* chose to end the war by a single combat; for which purpose they sent out their Champion compleatly armed, to challenge any man of the Army of *Israel* to come out and fight with him. This was *Goliath* of *Gath*, a chief city of the *Philistines*, of the race of those *Anakims* or Giants whose figure frightned the *Israelites*, when they were sent by *Moses* to spy out the land of *Canaan*. And this man daunted all their army at this time with his challenge. His height was six cubits and a span, *i. e.* ten foot high, near twice as tall as men of common stature, and no doubt proportionably thick and strong. This is an argument of the truth of sacred history, which reports nothing incredible upon this occasion: for even in the true histories of other countries we read that there have been men of a larger size. But the Mythology of the heathens, which is their sacred history, tells of Giants, who covered nine acres of ground, who walked over the seas, and whose heads reached above the clouds. I confess there seems to be something almost as extravagant in the report which the *Israelitish* Spies just now mentioned made of these very *Anakims*, *Numb. xiii. 33.* *We thought our selves*, said they, *but as Grasshoppers in comparison of them, and so they thought of us.* But this account of them is owned to be wrong, and must be corrected by the description of the *Philistine* here before us.

THE

THE Armour of this Champion shows both his strength, and his care to secure himself and terrifie his Enemies. The weight of his helmet, target, coat of mail, and greaves, together with his unusual thick spear, must amount at least to two hundred and fifty pounds of our ordinary weight, reckoning the *Jewish* shekel at half an ounce. And it required the strength of six good lusty men to bear such a load of armour from morning till night as if it had been but an ordinary dress, and to march and fight in it with that agility of body which is necessary in battle.

THUS armed, and his shield-bearer going before him, the Champion presented himself before the camp of *Israel*, and called out with a loud voice to let them know, that he came in behalf of the army of the *Philistines*, to engage in single combat with any man of *Israel* whom they should chuse out and agree upon to match him; and if, said he, your man kills me, we will all be your servants; but if I prevail against him, you shall yield the superiority to the *Philistines*, and serve us.' This challenge he continued to repeat morning and evening for forty days together, which had no other effect than to daunt the *Israelites*, and scare them out of his way; though King *Saul* did all he could to animate them to the combat, causing it to be proclaimed throughout his army, that if any man would engage this *Philistine* and conquer him, he would reward him with great riches, and give him his daughter to wife, and make his Father's house noble in *Israel*.

WHILE these things were transacting, *David* came into the camp of *Israel*, which I suppose was but a few miles from his Father's house at *Bethlehem*, the scene of this action being in the Tribe of *Judah*.

The

The occasion of his coming was, to bring provisions from his Father to his three eldest brethren who bore arms under *Saul*: for it seems it was the custom here, as well as in other nations of old, that the Soldiers, especially men of estate, bore their own charges when the war was in their own country.

AS *David* was delivering his Father's Message to his Brethren, the *Philistine* came up and proclaimed his challenge with his usual confidence and defiance. This caused *David* to turn about and look at him with great indignation: and when he understood how often he had appeared in that insulting manner, he was much concerned, for the honour of his people, that no body had answered him. Then he enquired what the King said to it; and those about him, told him, that the King had offered the reward aforesaid to any man that would undertake the Combat. Whereupon he declared that he apprehended no danger in encountering with such a Blasphemer, and shewed himself so inclinable to answer him, that *Eliab* his eldest brother grew very angry at him, and told him it was much fitter for him to take care of his sheep in the Wilderness, than to meddle with military affairs, which was but to betray his pride and vanity. For *Eliab* thought it a reflection upon himself and the whole army, that his youngest brother who came there accidentally upon an errand, should be so forward to engage in a business, which neither he nor any of the army durst undertake.

HOWEVER *David's* words were carried to King *Saul*, who sent for him, desiring to hear from his own mouth what he had to propose. *David* assured him it was his resolution to fight with the *Philistine*, and begged of the King to give way to it,

not doubting but by God's help he should obtain the victory. The King told him, he was but a young raw stripling, and no ways able to deal with the challenger, who besides his gigantick strength, had been bred to arms before he was born. But upon *David's* acquainting him with what he had experienced in his pastoral life in the Wilderness, how he had been obliged to fight twice in the defence of his Flock, once with a Lion, and afterwards with a Bear, and that he had killed them both with his own hands ; adding, that he looked upon these victories as good omens, that the *Philistine* should be as one of them, seeing he had defied the armies of the living God, which was the spiritual Flock, and repeating it with a divine confidence, that the same Lord who had rescued him from the paws of the Lion and of the Bear, would deliver him out of the hand of this *Philistine* : The King, struck with admiration of the courage and piety of this young Shepherd, gave him his blessing and licence in these few hearty words, *Go, and the Lord be with thee.*

NOW since King *Saul* objected the tender age and inexperience of *David*, as what made him an unequal match for the *Philistine*, let us see what weight there was in these objections.

I doubt not but we are all satisfied, that *David* was highly favoured with the divine assistance in this undertaking. Both he and his King look up to God, and commit their cause to him, as sensible that of themselves they were able to do nothing. And yet even humanly speaking, he was more a match for the *Philistine* than the Spectators at that time were aware of, or than we easily perceive by a cursory reading of his history.

WE are apt to think that his being bred a Shepherd, was a disadvantage to him; but it was quite otherwise. We must not form our notion of the pastoral life in ancient times, from the manners of our own Shepherds at this day. For though men whose estates were in land, commonly employed their children in the management of them; yet they did not neglect to educate them in such sciences as were fashionable, and necessary for the service of their country. Particularly we learn from the ancient writers of *Greece* and *Rome*, that men of the pastoral life were generally well skilled in arms. Their being much abroad in all sorts of weather, made them of a hardy constitution, and the necessary defence of their flocks and herds against robbers as well as savage beasts, often tryed their courage, and put them to the use of their weapons. At the same time those of honourable and wealthy Families were bred to the knowledge of religion, philosophy, and the Laws and Government of their country, and fitted for the greatest offices of it. Thus *Saul* was anointed King of *Israel*, when he was actually looking after his Father's cattel. Thus the first King and Founder of *Rome*, was a profest Shepherd. And about three hundred years after, *Quintius Cincinnatus* a husbandman, was sent for by the *Romans*, as he was at plow in his field, and created their Dictator in a dangerous war with the *Æqui*: which he finished successfully in six months; and then laid down his office, and returned to his little Farm again. After him, *Cato* the Censor, who served all the grand offices of *Rome*, military and civil, was the most industrious and skilful husbandman of his time.

THESE instances I have mentioned to show, that in the most civilized parts of the World, men of the best abilities for the affairs of Government, have been bred up in the business of grazing and husbandry. And indeed we need not to have gone out of our own country for examples to prove, that these things may consist very well together. And therefore when we read that *David* a Shepherd, had other great accomplishments, we are not to conceive that they were all miraculous gifts and sudden infusions; for the foundation of them was laid in a careful education.

2dly, AS to *David's* age at this time, he was certainly young, very young in comparison of the *Philistine*, who I believe was about twice as old. *Saul* calls him a youth, and we presently hear how the *Philistine* despised him for his smooth and youthful countenance, and thought himself dishonoured by being matched with one so young. However I cannot think him so young as fifteen or seventeen, as some Interpreters have conjectured. For I observe, that when *Saul's* Courtiers advised him to seek out an ingenious Harper, who might relieve him with his play, (when he was in melancholy fits; one of his servants answered, *Behold, I have seen a Son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him.* This was some time, probably a year, before *David's* engagement with the *Philistine*; and even then we must conclude him, from this character, to have been upwards of twenty, rather than under; for nothing under twenty could deserve the character here given of an able man, a good soldier, and prudent in speaking and acting. Besides this, we may observe

observe farther, that when *David* came to *Saul*, he did not use him only as a Musician, but made him his armour-bearer, which was a place that required a man of a good appearance. And presently after his conquest of the *Philistine*, *Saul* made him chief Captain of all his forces, and *Jonathan* presented him with his own best suit of apparel; so that we may well allow him to have been twenty three years old at this time. More than this it is not convenient to allow, for he was King at thirty, and the transactions between this and that time were enough to fill up the intermediate space of seven years.

3dly, *DAVID* was a man of uncommon courage and presence of mind; as we have heard from his recommender; and from his own relation how he had killed two of the fiercest and strongest of wild beasts. To this natural bravery a great supernatural addition had been lately made; for *Samuel* had privately anointed him to succeed *Saul* in the Kingdom of *Israel*; from which time it is said that *the Spirit of the Lord came upon him*. His Genius was elevated, and his mind disposed to all great undertakings, especially such as concerned the publick welfare. Accordingly when he came into the army to salute his Brethren, and had heard how often the *Philistine* had repeated his challenge, and that none of the *Israelites* had answered it, he looked upon himself to be providentially sent to vindicate the honour of God and his people. For who so proper to appear in this cause, as he who was chosen of God, and appointed to be the future Shepherd of *Israel*? No doubt but *David* encouraged himself with this consideration, that God who had given him an earnest of the Kingdom, would not suffer

him to fall in so just and necessary a defence of it. In this faith he address himself to the Combat with full assurance of the victory; though the ground of this assurance was not known to the Spectators.

4t<sup>h</sup>ly, *DAVID* shewed himself a well-advised man, in not fighting his antagonist in his own way, and at his own weapons. For in a close fight this monstrous strong man must needs have proved invincible, and for such fight alone he seems to have been prepared. And though *David* was once, by the direction of *Saul*, armed like him, yet he chose to lay aside all encumbrance, and encounter in his Shepherd's dress, just as he came from his flock; which was certainly best for the way of fighting which he chose, which was at a distance; and it bred security in his antagonist, who seeing a naked man advancing, and observing no other weapon in his hand but a Shepherd's crook, began to triumph, as sure of a cheap and speedy victory.

BUT the *Philistine* did not know that *David* was an excellent Slinger, and intended to attack him with stones at a distance. I suppose he brought his Sling with him; which being a leathern thong, or piece of canvass or cordage, with a loop at one end to hang it on the fingers, might be carried any where in his scrip or pocket without any trouble. And for stones, he picked up five, as many as he thought there could be occasion for, upon the spot.

NOW when the *Philistine* saw *David* running towards him, and imagined he was coming to handy-blows, he received a stone from his Sling, which piercing his forehead, sunk down into his brain, and caused him to fall upon his face to the ground.

THIS gives us occasion to speak of the use of the Sling, which did good service in the wars of old times, as we are assured by Historians of the best reputation. And though it may seem to us but a trifling instrument, and we cannot conceive how it could carry a stone with any certainty, which was discharged by the swing of the arm, this is because it is grown into disuse, and we want to be informed by experience what it will do. But when it was practised, we know there were Slingers who were able to do very certain, and very distant execution. The Author of the Book of *Judges* writes, Chap. xx. 16. that in the Tribe of *Benjamin*, there were *seven hundred left-handed Slingers, who could hit a mark at a convenient distance to a hairs breadth, and not miss.* And to make this probable, Commentators observe, that when the *Philistines* had disarmed the *Israelites* of swords and spears, as we read they did, it made the oppressed so much the more diligent in the exercise of the Sling, which could not be taken from them. It is reported of the *Baleares*, the ancient Inhabitants of *Majorca* and *Minorca*, Islands belonging to the crown of *Spain*, that they bred their children to this exercise from their cradle; and that their mothers set up their vi<sup>t</sup>uals every day as a mark, which they suffered not the children to eat of, till they had hit it. *Philostratus* in the life of *Apollo-nius Tyaneus*, Book ii. Chap 12. tells of certain *Indian Slingers*, who had as sure a hand as the *Benjamites* before mentioned, for they would strike the hair of a child's head, and never hurt the head it self. *Xenophon*, in his history of the wars between the *Per-sians* and *Grecians*, observes that on the *Grecian* side there was a band of Slingers from the *Isle of Rhodes*,

who were too hard for the *Perſian Archers*. And *Dion Cassius* writes, that when *Mark Anthony* fought with the *Parthians*, the *Roman Sling* over-shot the *Parthian Bow*; which we know was famous above all others.

THIS leads us to consider how far a Slinger could do execution. Those who have writ comparisons of the ancient and modern art of war, say, that a good Sling hath carried its full force to the distance of six hundred foot. How strong that force was, will scarce be believed by us who have lost the use of this art. But I must relate what I find in the writings of those *Ancients*, who were well acquainted with it. Many of the *Roman Authors* affirm then, that a good Slinger would discharge a leaden ball (for this they sometimes used) with such rapidity, that it would even melt in the flight. The grave *Seneca* speaks of this, as of a known thing. ‘ Motion, says he, rarefies the air, and rarefaction inflames it. Thus a bullet thrown out of a Sling, melts by the attrition of the air, as much as by fire.’ And thus we have seen the power of the Sling; and supposing, as we well may, that *David* had a good hand at it, we see what advantage he had over the *Philistine*, by fighting him in a way which he was not prepared for. His Sling and his Stone was as sure to prevail, as the very best fire-arms in the hand of the most expert Marksman at this day.

BUT when I set forth the Power of this Instrument, and the Skill which *David* had to use it, I have no design to derogate from the Providence of God, who bleſſed the hand which shot at the *Philistine*. I have only observed in this and other like cases, that God loves to work by probable means, and crowns honest

honest art and industry with success. And the praise of such success is ever ascribed to him by all great and good men, whatever other means they might have to attain it.

AND herein *David* excelled King *Saul*, and perhaps all other Kings that ever reigned upon Earth, that as he rejoiced to do the will of God, and to fight the battles of the Lord, so he went about his work with a singular alacrity, a marvellous affiance in God, and dependance upon his arm for succour and assistance. When he heard the proud boastings of this *Philistine*, it fired his zeal for God and his country, and he did not stand to act the nice Casuist, and spend time in debating whether it were lawful to engage in this combat, He considered this *Philistine* no otherwise than as the Lion and the Bear, which came to devour his Flock. He knew that by the general law and sentence of God, the *Philistines* were doomed to destruction, and that this had more particularly deserved it, by the reproachings and revilings which he had cast out upon God and his people. Therefore he entred the Lists as one that fought under the Banner of the God of *Israel*, and appeared in vindication of his honour and glory. And so he expresses himself when the *Philistine* disdained him for coming against him with a Shepherd's crook: *Thou comest to me*, says *David*, *with a sword, and a spear, and a shield*: *but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied*. *This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand, and I will smite thee, and take off thy head, and I will give the carcases of your host to the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the earth*; *that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel*. *And all this assembly shall know*  
*that*

*that the Lord saveth not by sword and by spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands.*

I recite these words of *David* to observe, what a strain of piety runs through them. It must needs fill the hearts of his people with inexpressible joy, to hear their young Shepherd speak so like a Prophet, Priest, and King, so incomparably beyond any thing that they could expect from his age and experience. And it was a plain argument that even then *David* was inspired with a great measure of the Spirit of God.

BY the inspiration of the same Spirit what power may we receive from on high to strengthen us, what courage to animate us, what counsel to direct us, if we will but resolve, after the example of *David*, to set God always before us, and desire to be instruments of his glory, and acknowledge him before all the World to be higher than the highest, and that he doth whatsoever pleaseth him in Heaven and in Earth!

HOW can such weak striplings as most of us are, encounter with the gigantick force of our Enemies ghostly and bodily? Why even as he did here, by virtue of our faith and trust in the name of the Lord our God. By his assistance a staff or a stone in our hand shall prevail against all the swords and spears of the mighty. Let us be but children in comparison of these over-bearing men; but let us be sure to be the children of God, and then they cannot hurt us. If we have no outward armour to put on, or with tender *David* we cannot bear it when it is on, yet while we are the children of God, we are better fortified than all the armies of the Aliens. *We have the shield of faith, the breast-plate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, and the divine promises, that all things shall work together for good to them that love God.*

WAS *David* the Lord's Anointed? why such are all good Christians in a spiritual sense; by the unction of his holy Spirit we are made Kings and Priests unto our God, we are enabled to vanquish and triumph over those three mystical *Goliaths*, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from them, and he will deliver us, if we faithfully serve him. Only let us be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, and let not our hearts fail us at the monstrous bulk, the threatening looks, the terrible weapons of these enemies.

IS it not enough for us that we have Omnipotence on our side? Can any thing hurt us, while we are covered with the wings of the most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty? All the danger of our warfare is, lest we should make peace and contract alliances with the Enemies of God and our Souls, which the heavenly Law has utterly forbid; for in so doing we should lose our great strength, and forfeit our privilege of the divine protection. So that it is their friendship, not their enmity, that can hurt us. Let us not exchange our humility for their pride, nor our piety for their blasphemy, nor our trust in God for confidence in the creature, in an arm of flesh; and we are safe. The weapons of our warfare are the Graces of the divine Spirit, which though they may seem weak and foolish to the World, yet this weakness of God will be found stronger than men, and this foolishness much beyond their wisdom.

AND let us not forget to imitate *David*, in keeping our spiritual Enemies at a distance; for if we suffer them to come close up to us, they may prove too strong for us. I speak of those things which are

without

without us; among which we may reckon all sorts of ill company. To keep them at a distance, is absolutely necessary for our safety, and requires but firmness of mind enough to refuse their invitations. If sinners entice us, we should reject their allurements; which are easily withstood at the beginning: but if once complied with, they quickly intangle us in the cords of their iniquities and the bonds of their sins.

THE same may be said of any of the objects of Sense, which if admitted into the mind, may be too hard for religion and reason. The best way to deal with them, is to keep them at a distance. We should make a covenant with our eyes, that we will not look upon them, and with our ears, that we will not hear them. At a distance they are no more than *Mormo's* and pictures of Giants; but their influence increases by their approach, and the impressions we take from them shew that there is a dangerous power in them.

To conclude; LET us not encounter the infernal *Goliath*, the grand Enemy of our Religion and virtue, in his own way, nor at his own weapons: for he has many stratagems and devices, whereby he lies in wait to surprize us, and betray us unto death. But in all our conflicts with him, let us hearken to the voice, and observe the orders of our Spiritual Leaders, the Prophets, Apostles, and Ministers of God's word, who were well trained in the discipline of this spiritual warfare. Above all, let us look stedfastly unto *Jesus the Captain of our Salvation*, the *Messiah*, the Anointed of God, of whom *David* was but a Type, who hath destroyed him who had the power of death, i. e. the Devil; and hath delivered all true Christians, who through fear of death had been all their life-time subject to bondage. To him, with &c.



# S E R M O N L X I .

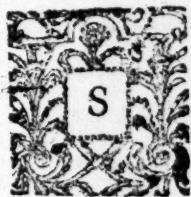
*On the Sixth Sunday after TRINITY.*

M O R N I N G .

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2 SAMUEL xii. 13.

*And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.*



T. Paul, 2 Cor. ii. observes, that the preaching of God's Word is to some Men the favour of Life, to others the favour of Death, by reason of the different Affections wherewith they entertain it, and the contrary conclusions which they draw from it. But in no part of Scripture does this happen so commonly, as in the History of those Sins and Miseries wherewith the best of Men were sometimes overtaken. The design of the Spirit of God in recording such Misfortunes, is, to admonish us all of the frailty of our Nature, and deceitfulness of our Hearts, and to represent to the best of Men, how much it concerns them to be constantly upon their Guard, and never to indulge themselves in the neglect of their Prayers, or omission of any religious Duties, lest Satan, who always lies in wait to surprize them, should

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get an advantage over them by his Temptations. And likewise to encourage them, if at any time they happen to fall into his snare, to disengage themselves from it with all speed; not to be pleased with his Enchantments; not to abandon themselves to sinful courses; not to despair of the Mercy of God, and imagine that they have unpardonably sinned against him, and have nothing but the portion of Reprobates left them; since they are assured, that those who without all peradventure are the Elect Children of God, and rest in him, did not run the whole course of this mortal Life without some great slip and offence committed against him. These are the instructions which the Wisdom of God intends to give us, by shewing us the miscarriages of his most eminent, faithful Servants.

BUT then there are a perverse Generation of Men, who make a pernicious use of these Memorials, and conclude from them, that because God was quickly reconciled to his offending Servants, and in general has express his high approbation of them, as he has done of this very King *David*, that therefore he is not so great an Enemy to Sin, as we commonly represent him. In consequence of this persuasion they flatter themselves, that they have good authority for gratifying their Lusts, and need not be much concerned to mortifie them, provided they do in general perform the positive part of the Divine Laws. Hence they proceed to assert, that there is an unchangeable decree of their designation to eternal Life; and that the love and favour of God is so sure to them, that nothing which they have a mind to do, can forfeit it, or separate them from it. And so they come at last to settle in this opinion, that let their present life and conversation

conversation be as bad as it will, yet being of the number of God's chosen Servants, their End shall be happy, and they shall certainly meet with some event, which by the Grace of God will give them an effectual turn and conversion from a bad life, before they be taken out of the World. Thus multitudes of People live under the power of these delusions, continuing in Sin that Grace may abound, and wresting these and many such Scriptures from their true design, to such a sense as lays conscience asleep, and carries them smoothly to their own destruction.

THAT we may therefore make a profitable use of the History of *David's* Fall here before us, let us consider,

- I. THE matter of his transgressions.
- II. THE aggravation of his guilt.
- III. THE punishment which God inflicted,  
And,
- IV. THE voluntary penance which he underwent for them.

AND *1st*, As to the matter of *David's* transgressions, and the occasion which involved him in them, I shall take the account from *Josephus, Antiq. Jud.* lib. vii. c. 7. who reports it thus: 'That about twelve years after *David* had been settled in the quiet possession of the Kingdom of *Israel* and *Judah*, he committed a war which he had with the *Ammonites*, to the management of *Joab* the General of his Army, retiring himself to his palace at *Jerusalem*. During which time of recess and leisure, he fell in love with *Bathsheba* the wife of *Urias*, one of *Joab's* captains, upon an accidental view which he had of her, and so far pursued his criminal passion, as to cause her to be brought to his own bed: But

‘ But to cover the dishonesty of this practice, her daily residence was at her own house. Proving with child in the long absence of her Husband, who might convict her of adultery, and take away her life, she besought the King to think of some way how to provide for her safety. Hereupon *David* sent for *Urias* from the Siege of *Rabbath*, and enquired of him about the state of the Town and Army; and when his demands were satisfied, he ordered him to go home, and sent a good supper after him, to feast with his Wife. But understanding next day that *Urias* had tarried all night with the Guards about the palace, he called him, and asked him why he went not to his own house to visit his family, as husbands that have been long absent are desirous to do. *Urias* replied, That it did not become him to take his ease and his pleasure, while the Ark and Priests of God, and his General and Fellow-Soldiers were encamped in the open field, and in an Enemy’s Country. Then the King invited him to spend that day also in the palace, promising to send him back to the Army the day following. At night he entertained him at Supper in his own company, and caused him to drink wine very plentifully, and then dismissed him to his Lodging, hoping that he would go home. But when he found next morning that *Urias* had lodged in the Guards, as he had done before, the King wrote a Letter to *Joab*, intimating to him that *Urias* had offended him; that therefore when they made an assault upon the City, he should assign him the hottest place of the engagement, and then retire from him, that he might be cut off. This Letter he sealed, and gave to *Urias* to deliver to *Joab*; who having perused it, followed

ed the instructions, and ordered *Urias* to attempt a part of the wall where he knew the *Ammonites* would make a stout resistance, complimenting him with the reputation which he had with the King and the whole Army on the account of his valour; and promising to support him effectually, if he made any impression upon the enemy in that place. But this he never intended to do; on the contrary he had given secret orders to the Soldiers who accompanied him, that when they should see the *Ammonites* fall out with the greatest fury, they should retreat and abandon *Urias*. Most of them did so, and *Urias* was slain with some few of his Men that stood by him, after they had destroyed a much greater number of their Enemies.

THE success of this affair was quickly notified to the King, and to the Wife of the deceased, who put her self in mourning for her Husband, and kept retired some days, as the *Jewish* Law required; which being ended, the King took her to wife, and she bare him a Son.

SO that it was three quarters of a year at least that *David* was sinning and offending against God, without making any step towards repentance: For it was not 'till after the Child was born, that *Nathan* the Prophet was sent from God to awaken the King to a sense of his evil doings; which the Prophet performed with a very wise and happy address, proposing to the King, by way of information and demand of justice, the case of a poor nameless Man, who had been grievously injured by his rich Neighbour, whereby he drew the King to pass a very righteous sentence upon the case, and then applied it to himself, *Thou art the Man*; and hence he proceeds very

plainly to reprove him for the adultery and murder which he had committed.

THUS we have seen the matter of *David's* Sins: They were the grossest violations of the sixth and seventh Commandments of the moral Law: which was the first thing to be treated of in this Discourse. Let us now proceed,

Idly, TO consider those circumstances which attended his Sins, and made them the more grievous, more exceeding sinful.

THE first circumstance which aggravated his guilt, was his ingratitude to God, and unsuitable returns which he made for the greatest Blessings. *David* had been raised, by a special and signal hand of Divine Providence, from the low estate of a Shepherd, to be King of all *Israel* and *Judah*. God had made choice of him, the youngest of seven Brethren, and sent *Samuel* to Anoint him when he was but a youth, and to admonish him of the reasons why he was destined to the Throne, in opposition to *Saul* and his Family: Because *Saul* had disobeyed the voice of the Lord in several cases; particularly in not destroying the *Amalekites*, as God had commanded. Therefore *David* was appointed for his Successor, in confidence that he would act with quite another Spirit, and be very observant of the will of God in all things. In order to glorifie God by such an exact Obedience it was, that God had delivered him from many imminent dangers of his Life, during the reign of *Saul*; who seeing how the Divine Providence raised him daily in the Esteem and Affections of the People, and that he was looked upon as the Heir apparent of his Crown, he mortally hated him; and sometimes put him upon hazardous expeditions against the

*Philistines*,

Philistines, hoping that he would fall by their hands; at other times he cast his Javelin at him; and when he sought so notoriously to destroy him, that *David* durst no longer abide in his Court, but was forced to fly for his Life, and conceal himself in Caves and Desarts, as well as he could, *Saul* pursued him both with armed Force and secret Machinations. From all which the good hand of God constantly rescued him, and in due time cut off *Saul* to make room for *David*, who succeeded him not only in the Royal Power and Dignity, but likewise in the possession of his House, and the enjoyment of his Wives: For *these*, says *Nathan*, *God gave into your bosom*; which being added to those whom he had Married before he was King, made his number of Wives ten or twelve, as the *Rabbins* observe: And he might have had more, if he would have taken them in the way which God then allowed of.

BUT after all these indulgences, to give himself up to the Adulterous Concupiscence of another man's Wife, and for the satisfying such a Lust, to violate two of God's most Sacred Laws in a horrible manner, was a foul act of Ingratitude towards his most High and Gracious Benefactor.

2dly, ANOTHER Circumstance which aggravated *David's* Sins, was the contempt and slight which he put upon the Authority of God's Laws, by the Commission of them. He was now grown to be an absolute Prince, and began to flatter himself that he was above the Laws; at least, that he might take more liberty with them than other men. It is true, Murderers and Adulterers were by the command of God to be put to death: But what mortal man could touch his Life, or hurt so much as a hair of his

Head, who held the Sword of Justice in his own hand, and had the disposal of all Judges and Ministers of Justice, as those who were but his own Creatures and Vassals? And so far indeed he reckoned right, that he was in no danger from the proceedings of any Court or human Tribunal. But however, this ought not to have encouraged him to make bold with the Laws of God, as if they were not intended to bind men of his high Station and Dignity. For God, who is King over all, hath given no man, of what rank or quality soever, a licence to offend against Piety and Virtue; but has threatened that *mighty Sinners shall be mightily tormented*, if not in the present, yet in a future State, where *Tophet* is prepared of Old even for such Kings as despise the will of God, and that it is heated hotter for them than for meaner men.

AND even with regard to the present State, it is a fatal delusion for the greatest Potentate upon Earth to assume to himself a liberty of Sinning, as fancying that he is above the reach of Temporal Punishments. For God has a thousand ways to inflict them on the highest head, and many undeniable instances there are of Executions of this kind. With these he threatens *David* by the Prophet *Nathan*: *Because thou hast despised me in taking the Wife of Urias, and killing him with the Sword of the Children of Ammon; therefore the Sword shall never depart from thy House. Behold, I will raise up Evil against thee out of thine own Family; and I will take thy Wives before thine eyes, and will give them to thy Neighbour, and he shall lie with them in the sight of this Sun. For thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the Sun.* How punctually all this was executed, we shall see presently; and how *David*, by promising himself more

impunity

impunity than other men, brought more temporal judgments upon his own head. His contempt of such Punishments did but aggravate and enhanse them.

3dly, THE greatness of *David's Example* made no small addition to the guilt of his Sin. For as he was a King, he was the Guardian of the Laws of his Kingdom, and was bound to testify his own good Affection and Esteem for them, as well by a diligent practice of them in his own Person and Family, as by enforcing the Observance of them with rewards and punishments throughout his Kingdom. Nothing can give such a currency to good Laws, as to see them stamped with the Royal example. But when they are used like the Spiders web, and easily broke through by the great ones, the meaner sort of People quickly follow them, if it were for nothing else but to be in the fashion. And though those who hold the reins of Government, should keep never so strict a hand upon their Subjects, yet they will excite them to do little more than blaspheme at the severity which is exercised upon them, so long as they allow themselves the enjoyment of those sinful pleasures which they deny to others. For those who are restrained by such hands, will be apt to think that their Superiors envy them such enjoyments as too good for them, rather than prohibit them as hurtful. But indeed there is not often occasion given to complain of such Envy: For it is notorious in experience, that immoral Governors are not forward to lash their favourite Vice, as thinking it but reasonable and modest, to connive as much as they can at that Vice in others, which they know others see plain enough in their own practice. And they know very well, that if they can but make it fashionable, they shall much

lessen the Odium of it, and thenceforward may enjoy it with more reputation, ease, and security, as having many who by the like guilt, are bribed and interested in their favour.

THUS the bad example of *David* added to the guilt of his Sin, because it encouraged his Subjects to imitate him in it, and likewise cooled his Zeal against it, that he could not heartily punish it in others, so long as he continued in it himself.

4thly, *DAVID's* Sin was much aggravated by the Merits of *Urias*, the suffering Party; who was of the same Religion with the King, and consequently entitled to all the benefit and protection of its Laws. For though he is called an *Hittite*, as being descended of the children of *Heth*, yet it is manifest, from the place he was in, and the concern he express'd for the Ark of God, that he was a worshipper of the God of *Israel*. He was moreover a Citizen of *Jerusalem*, a considerable Officer in the Army, a man of great Valour and Loyalty, one of *David's* Worthies, 2 *Sam.* xxiii. who preferred the Service of his Prince and Country before his own interests and pleasures, as appears from the character given of him before. All which made it much more inexcusable in *David* to injure him as he did, than if he had been some worthless man, who had never deserved well of him.

THESE were the chief circumstances which aggravated *David's* transgressions, which was the second thing to be considered in the order of this Discourse. Let us now, in the

3<sup>rd</sup> place, SEE the Punishments which God inflicted upon him for them.

AND

AND we heard just now what God threatned by *Nathan*, that his Adultery should be punished with the publick violation of his own Wives, and his Murther with continual Parricides and Slaughters in his own Family. And here it is worth while to note the speedy and surprizing Execution of these threatnings. For though as soon as *David* had confessed his Sin, God was pleased so far to remit it, as to promise he would spare his own Life, yet he presently struck his new-born Child with death; and the very next chapter opens a sad beginning of Calamities in the Royal Family. *Amnon*, one of his Sons, commits an incestuous Rape upon his daughter *Thamar*; and *Absalom* another Son, assassinates his Brother *Amnon* in revenge of this lewd fact. A little while after the same *Absalom* raises all *Israel* in rebellion against the King his Father, whom he drives from *Jerusalem* to the other side of *Jordan*, seizes upon his houses, and abuses all his Wives and Concubines to make them his own. This was done in pursuance of *Abitophel's* Counsel, who told *Absalom* that all the People, when they should hear of this impudent violation, would conclude that there was no danger that the King and his Son should ever be reconciled, and consequently they would adhere more unanimously and firmly to *Absalom*. And this was done in that publick manner as *Nathan* had threatned, *in the sight of Israel, and in the face of the Sun*, as we read 2 Sam. xvi. 21, 22.

AND though the xviiith chapter presents us with the agreeable event of this unnatural Rebellion, which ended in the overthrow of *Absalom's* Party, and the restoration of *David* to his Throne and Kingdom; yet the Father had the mortification to

lose his Son in the Battle, whom he tenderly loved, and bitterly bewailed his death, wishing it had pleased God that he had died for him: and the rather, no doubt, because he considered this loss as a farther Execution of God's threatening by *Nathan*, that the Sword should never depart from his House.

LASTLY, though *David* did not live to see it, yet we find another of his Sons cut off by the Sword, even *Adonijah*, at the command of his Brother *Solomon*, for aspiring to place himself on the Throne of *David* his Father. Add to this the misfortune which happened to this Family in the next Succession, when the ten Tribes of *Israel* wholly revolted and separated for ever from the House of *David*, and the frequent Wars which they levied against them; and we cannot be at a loss to make out the truth of this Prophecy, and to prove that *David* was punished according to the full intent and meaning of God's Denunciation.

BUT besides the outward, there was an inward Sword, a sword of long remorse and horror which pierced the soul and reins of this Offender, and created him many a restless Night, and cost him many a flood of Tears, as we find him often complaining in his Book of Psalms. And this brings us, in the

IV<sup>th</sup> and last place, to consider how humbly and heartily *David* repented of these his grievous Sins. The reproof of *Nathan* he received with that humility and reverence which was due to a Message sent from God. And when, according to the Prophet's Denunciation, his infant Son was struck with a mortal Sickness, he did not frame his looks and carriage to a contemptuous Gallantry, but laid aside his royal Apparel, put on Sackcloth, fasted, and made the hard and cold ground his Bed, for seven Nights together,

ther, i. e. from the day that his Child was taken ill, till the day of its Death, in which time he interceded with God for its Life, and poured out his Soul continually in penitential Prayers and Confessions, a specimen of which he hath left us in his fifty first Psalm, composed upon this Occasion; which was probably a part of his daily Devotions through all the following course of his Life.

THIS deep humiliation, in a sense of his own demerits, brought him to a perfect submission and resignation to the divine Will under the severest Dispensations. Thus when he was forced to fly before his rebellious Son *Absalom*, and *Zadok* the Priest upon that occasion attended him with the Ark of God; he thought it too great an honour to be so waited on, and ordered him to carry it back again to *Jerusalem*. For, says he, *if I shall find favour in the Eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back again, and shew me both his Ark and his Habitation*. But if God say, *I have no delight in thee; behold, here I am; let him do unto me as seemeth him good*. The same conscience of what he had deserved, taught him forbearance and long-suffering under the insults of Men. For when *Shimei* curst him at the time of his said flight, casting dust and stones at him, and calling him bloody Man, and Son of *Belial*, *David* bare it all with a silent Patience. And when *Abishai*, Soldier-like, ask'd, *Why should this dead dog curse my Lord the King?* Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head: the King meekly answered, *Let him curse; he has God's Permission for it*. Who then shall say, *why hast thou done so?* It may be the Lord will look on my Afflictions, and requite me good for his cursing this day.

SUCH

SUCH was *David's* opinion of his own demerits, in contemplation of the injuries which he had done to God and Man by his Sins. As he had sinned grossly, so he repented bitterly. And his Sins were of very short continuance in comparison of his Repentance. Very contrary to the practice of most Men, who spend the best of their days in the service of the World and the Flesh, and depend upon a little of their last and worst time to reconcile themselves to God, and prepare their Souls for his Kingdom.

*DAVID*, says St. *Ambrose*, by an ingenuous confession of his Sin, and a thorough compunction of Heart and Mind, recommended himself to the Divine Pardon. No sooner was he convinced, but he was converted. He made haste and prolonged not the time in returning to his obedience of God's Commands. Shew me now a Man among the rich and honourable, who when he is reproved by any of God's Ministers, takes it so patiently, and reforms his life so effectually as this great Prince did. He was like other Kings in his Sin, but very unlike them in his Repentance. For what crowned Head ever implored the Mercy of God with so many Prayers and Tears, humbling himself in the Dust, and watching and fasting commonly whole nights and days together, and calling upon all great Sinners to do the like, teaching them what a grievous and bitter thing it is to forfeit the Favour of God by rebelling against him; but assuring them withal, that when they have sinned, it is much more pleasing to God, and profitable for themselves, to confess it, than to extenuate their Guilt, and conceal and dissemble it.

AFTER all, we know very well, that notwithstanding the Miscarriages here before us, this Offender

was one of the greatest of God's Servants, an excellent King, and a most divine Prophet, endued with a wonderful measure of the Spirit of God, and one of the greatest Pillars of his Church; in whose Words the whole Church Militant upon Earth, daily offers up her Prayers and Praises.

LET us not then dishonour his Memory by any light or undecent Remarks upon his Miscarriages, but treat him as one who highly deserves the character of a Holy Man. Let us take warning by his Misfortunes, not to provoke God with any the like Sins; and for whatever sins we have committed or shall commit, let us imitate him in a serious Repentance, that so making a timely Peace with God in this Life, we may be happily restored to his Favour, and may be numbered with this his Saint in Glory everlasting, through the Merits of the Son of David, even Jesus Christ our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth, &c.



SIE RAMON



## SERMON LXII.

*On the Sixth Sunday after TRINITY,  
EVENING.*

2 SAMUEL xix. 1.

*And it was told Joab, Behold, the King weepeth and mourneth for Absalom.*



HEN David, at the instigation of a pernicious lust, had slain his servant Uriah with the sword of the children of Ammon, God passed this sentence upon him by the Prophet Nathan, that the sword should never depart from his house: and we presently read how the sentence begun to be executed. His first-born Ammon was assassinated by his third son Absalom, for committing a rape upon Tamar, Absalom's sister by Maacah the daughter of Talmai King of Geshur. And it is hard to say, whether the Rape it self, or the way of revenging it, were the greater affront both to the paternal and regal authority of David. Absalom had reason heinously to resent the outrage done to his sister; but to take upon him the execution of justice, was to invade his father's prerogative; and shewed that he had a spirit capable of rebellion.

DAVID

DAVID was extremely offended at *Amnon* for what he had done, and punished him no doubt with all the severity of frowns and reproofs: but it doth not appear that his displeasure went any farther. However, *Absalom* was resolved that he should not escape so. Nothing would satisfie him but the life of the offender, which he took away in this manner.

T W O years after the injury above-mentioned, says *Josephus*, when it might be presumed that *Absalom's* resentment of it was cooled, he had a great sheep-sheering in *Baalzephon* a city of *Ephraim*, to which he invited the King his father, and all his brethren. The King excused himself, because he would not make the entertainment too chargeable, but gave his children leave to be at it. They all went, and gave *Absalom* an opportunity to execute the revenge, which he had long meditated. For when the guests were well warmed with the Entertainment, his servants (upon a signal given them by their master) fell upon *Amnon* and slew him.

WE need not say how astonishing this murder was, not only to King *David*, but to all that heard of it. *Absalom* knew there could be no safety for him, but in a speedy flight. He therefore fled to the King of *Gesbur*, a neighbouring Prince, who was his grand-father by the mother's side; and there he continued three years.

AT the end of which he was restored to his own Country by *Joab's* means; who perceiving that the King had a longing desire to recall him, and only wanted some plausible ground for it, he caused such an address to be made to him, as obtained leave for *Absalom* to return to his own house: but he was expressly forbidden to come to court, that both he and all men might take notice how much the King abhorred

horred such a way of shedding blood, and how loath he was to pardon it, even in his own beloved son.

WHEN *Absalom* had lived privately two years without seeing the King his father, he grew impatient of his solitude, and bemoaned himself to *Joab*, declaring that if he had foreseen this, he would have remained still an exile in *Gesbur*; and that even now he would rather suffer death, than lie under his father's displeasure any longer. These passionate expressions moved *Joab* to intercede for him, and *David* to admit him into his presence and favour.

BUT it quickly appeared, that *Absalom* had not solicited this reconciliation out of a dutiful love and desire to be near his father, but to get the greater advantage to carry on a plot against his life and government, which he had even now formed in his mind, and for the accomplishing of which he procured men of arms to attend him under the notion of a guard. Every day also he rose early, and presented himself before the King's palace, and conversed with such people as resorted thither for justice: and to any man who had lost his cause, he would say, *the cause was good, but there was no man deputed of the King to hear it.* Which was a calumny. For we are assured before, ch. viii. 15. that *David executed judgment and justice unto all his people*: which he could never have done, if he had not deputed Judges and proper Magistrates to assist him in it. But this accusation passed for truth with those who having a bad cause, lost it. And they readily joined their wishes with *Absalom*, when pretending to bewail their hard fortune he said, *Oh that I were made a judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause, might come to me, and I would do him justice.* And it was so, that when any man came near to *Absalom*

*Absalom to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him and kissed him.* By which address he stole the hearts of the *Israelites*, who were weak enough to be cheated with such empty condescensions out of their duty to a worthy King, and at last out of their lives and fortunes.

IN the fortieth year of King *David's* reign, reckoning from the time of his first anointing by *Samuel*, and about four years after the reconciliation above-mentioned, *Absalom* petitions the King for leave to go to *Hebron*, and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for restoring him to his own Country, according to a vow which he had made in his exile. But this was abusing religion to cover his rebellious design.

FOR when he came to *Hebron*, attended with a great concourse of People, and particularly with two hundred citizens of *Jerusalem*, he sent for *Achitophel the Gilonite*, once *David's* best counsellor, but now some way discontented and alienated from him, and caused himself to be proclaimed King by sound of trumpet. Whereupon the men whose hearts he had stolen away, resorted to him from all parts: for he had his accomplices in all the Tribes of *Israel*, who presently spread the news, as he had directed them, that such a day *Absalom was crowned King in Hebron*.

HEBRON was a city in the Tribe of *Judah*, very considerable both for its strength and antiquity. It was the place where *David* begun his kingdom; and where he reigned seven years. And lying but twenty miles southward from *Jerusalem*, it alarmed *David* with an apprehension that *Absalom* would quickly be with him. Wherefore being loath to be shut up within walls, or to subject his People to the miseries of a siege, and not having forces in a readiness

ness to take the field, he resolved to fly to the farther side of *Jordan*, carrying with him his great officers and most faithful friends, and leaving the government of his royal house to the management of his concubines.

THE King, in this retreat, wanted not the attendance of a great many men, among whom were six hundred old soldiers, who had been the companions of his troubles in the days of King *Saul*. *Ittai the Gittite*, a great officer and a foreigner, of *Gath* the Country of the famous *Goliath*, he would willingly have excused from this wandring. *Return to thy place*, said he, *and abide with King Absalom*, for thou art a stranger and an exile. *Why should I make thee go up and down with us*, who camest hither but yesterday? *Return with thy brethren*; mercy and truth be with thee. But this stout man answered, *As the Lord liveth*, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord shall be, whether in life or death, even there also will thy servant be. The King seeing his unshaken fidelity and affection to him, was greatly comforted, and accepted of his service.

WHEN *David* was got into the Wilderness on the banks of *Jordan*, *Absalom* entred *Jerusalem*, and took possession of the royal palace. And here it was that *Achitophel* advised him to abuse his father's concubines, and make them his own. ' For (says he) from thence the people will be persuaded that you and your father can never be reconciled; and so they will stand firm to your cause: whereas in the present circumstances it may be suggested, that a peace will be concluded between the father and son, at the expence of certain subjects, who must be sacrificed for what is past.' *Absalom* did as *Achitophel* advised,

advised, and thereby fulfilled the curse which *Nathan* had denounced against *David* for abusing *Uriah*'s wife; *that an adversary should arise out of his own family, who should do the like to his wives in a publick manner, in the sight of the sun.*

BUT now the measure of *Absalom*'s impieties filled up apace, and the hand of divine Justice began to lay hold of him, and hurry him to his deserved punishment. For the next thing which came under his consideration was, how to manage the war against his father.

AND here his counsellors were divided. *Achitophel* required a light army of twelve thousand choice men, with which he proposed to pursue *David* without delay; 'And I will surprize him, said he, weary with travel, and weak-handed, and I will terrifie those about him, so that they shall flee; and I will smite the King only. This will reduce all *Israel* to your obedience: when your father is cut off, they have none but you to own for their King. Pursue him then without loss of time, and you will establish your self without a war.' This counsel pleased *Absalom* and all the knowing men about him: and it was certainly well grounded. For wicked devices must be executed speedily; it is dangerous to deliberate about them. Delays give people time to think; to weigh the sin and the danger, and to shrink from the prosecution.

BUT *Hushai*, who was taken into *Absalom*'s Councils, tho' secretly in *David*'s interest, gave quite contrary advice, and enforced it with the following arguments. 'Sir, said he, you need not be told, that your father is a great captain, and has the best of soldiers about him. You must not think that he is insen-

• sible of his present circumstances, or that he can be  
• easily surprized. He knows the advantages of war,  
• both by night and day. He is certainly now in the  
• field, but his forces are not collected into one body.  
• He has laid several ambushes, which will break out  
• upon your men, and put them into disorder, and the  
• report will run, that *Absalom* is routed; and your  
• soldiers which are behind will believe it, and quit  
• the field. For all *Israel* knows his conduct in war;  
• that he is perfect at stratagems, and that nothing but  
• numbers can oppress him. Let us not therefore  
• think of encountering him with a flying squadron;  
• but raise all *Israel* from *Dan* to *Beersheba*, as the sand  
• upon the sea-shore for multitude, and appear in your  
• own person at the head of them. And then we shall  
• fall upon him, where-ever we find him, as the dew  
• upon the grass, *i. e.* we shall infinitely out-number  
• him, so that it will be impossible for any one of his  
• men to escape us. Nor will we be afraid of his for-  
• tifying himself in the best fenced city. The hundred  
• thousands of *Israel* will be sufficient to drag every  
• stone of the walls and buildings of that city into the  
• ditch.'

THIS looked like brave, open, safe advice; and it was delivered with such an emphasis, that it gave a turn to *Absalom* and his Senators, and brought them to be of the same opinion. However the author of it would not venture it, as knowing *Achitophel's* to be the best; and therefore he sent immediate intelligence to *David* of what had passed in *Absalom's* Councils, advising him not to lodge another night in the field, lest his adversaries should after all follow the counsel of *Achitophel*; but pass over *Jordan*, where he would be certainly safest from the pursuit of his enemies.

ACCORDING to *Hushai*'s counsel, *Absalom* took time to raise a great multitude of forces to make war upon his father, and made *Amasa* General of his army, opposing him to *Joab*, who was his cousin-german; for they were both descended from daughters of *Jesse*, and sisters of *David*; so that *David* was their uncle. With this army *Absalom* passed over *Jordan*, and pitched his Camp near his father in the Country of *Gilead*.

FOR *David* was now got on the other side *Jordan*, and encamped in a strong city, says *Josephus*, the best fortified in that Country; but he does not tell us the name of it. There he was kindly entertained by all the great men of those parts, who were moved to succour him, partly thro' compassion of his present circumstances, and partly in contemplation of his former felicity. So that he and his men wanted for nothing.

AND tho' he had but a handful of soldiers in comparison of *Absalom* (*Josephus* makes them four thousand, the sacred history hath not determined their number) yet being often tried and well-disciplined men, it was thought best to come to a decisive battle, and not tarry till *Absalom* should attack him.

*DAVID* offered to put himself at the head of his men; but his friends would not suffer it: ' For, said ' they, if we should be defeated in your company, all ' would be lost. But if one half of us should be cut ' to pieces while you are in the city, the enemy would ' think it no great advantage, because they will be ' persuaded that you have means to re-inforce us, and ' renew the battle.' This counsel was approved, and *David* remained in the city. And as his men went out, he placed himself at the gate, and gave them his

blessing, and exhorted them to behave themselves valiantly; but withal he laid a strict charge upon all the captains and officers, that as they loved him, they should offer no violence to his son *Absalom*.

*JOAB*, *David's* General, drew up his men, and offered *Absalom* battle: who likewise advanced with his soldiers; who being very numerous, fell on with great assurance of victory, and animated one another with a near view of rewards from their master, if by this day's action they could put him in quiet possession of the throne of *Israel*.

BUT *Joab* and his men being the best soldiers of all *Israel*, quickly broke thro' *Absalom's* undisciplined army, and put them to flight. And the Country round about being very woody, was a great impediment to those who sought to make their escape, so that there was a slaughter of twenty thousand men.

*ABSALOM*, mounted upon a swift mule, fled with the rest; and his mule passing under an oak, his large head of hair, which I suppose was tyed at the ends upon this occasion, catched in the boughs of the tree, and so entangled him that he hung by it, and his mule went from under him. A soldier of *Joab's* observing this, went and told his master, who came and dispatched *Absalom*, and cast his body into a pit in the wood, and laid a great heap of stones upon it. Then he blew a trumpet to recall his men from pursuing *Israel*; and *Israel* went away, every one to his tent.

THUS *Absalom's* rebellion ended with his life: but his father's sorrow for him ended not here. The news of his death went so near *David's* heart, that it almost strangled him with grief, and overwhelmed him with tears; and he professed he would have chose

to have lost his kingdom and his life too, for the saving of his son *Absalom*.

AND yet how unworthy was this Son of such a Father, and the cause of how many tears and groans! *Absalom's* character has nothing good in it, but this, that he was a beautiful man: but the ornaments of his body were horribly sullied by the corruptions of his mind, which rendred him as great a monster as any we find in ancient Tragedy. For he was doubly guilty of parricide, in assassinating his Brother, and rebelling against his Father. Of both which heinous offences behold the aggravations. When he slew his Brother, it was two years after the abuse of his Sister, during which, passion had time to cool, and submit to reason. It was at an entertainment of his own making, in his own house, for his own nearest friends, who came to partake of it at his own earnest invitation. It was perpetrated in the presence of all his Brethren, and with the violation of those Laws of hospitality, which the greatest *Barbarians* ever held to be most sacred. It was a murder which he knew would pierce the soul of his Father with the acutest grief, for the death of one Son, and the guilt of another.—With all these aggravating circumstances was this fratricide attended.

2dly, *ABSALOM* rebelled against his Father, after he had obtained his pardon for the murder of his Brother. After he had repeated his addresses to be recalled from banishment, declaring that he had rather die than live any longer excluded from the presence of God and his Father, he abused these pretences of religion and filial piety, to carry on a design most odious to God and man. ‘ Let the King, said he, but ‘ admit me to wait on him, and then let him kill me, ‘ if he find iniquity in me.’ This he spoke with a

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heart full of sedition and rebellion. And ' Let thy servant, I pray thee, go to *Hebron*, to offer a sacrifice which I vowed while I was at *Gesbur* in *Syria*, ' saying, If the Lord shall bring me again indeed to *Jerusalem*, then will I serve the Lord.' This he said with the air of a Devotee, when he intended no other service than that of his own ambition, and had sent out Emissaries to acquaint the Conspirators, that he was going to begin his reign in *Hebron*. What a black Fury was here, under the appearance of an Angel of light! What a Son, who could take arms against his own Father, and attempt with all his might to dethrone him and murder him! What a lover of his people, who could involve them in a rebellion which brought twenty thousand of them to woful destruction! What a corrector of the incest of his Brother and Sister, who committed much worse with his Father's Concubines! For such a Son as this *David* mourned and wept, and wished that he had redeemed him from the Grave with the loss of his own life. But what if he had acted a quite contrary part, and had cut off this *Absalom* with the sword of Justice when he assassinated *Amnon*: or at least had rejoiced with his people, and given thanks to his General, for fairly ridding him in the day of battle, of a Son of so much mischief and reproach? Would not this have been much more to *David*'s honour and commendation?

MUCH better Sons have been sentenced to death by their own fathers, after they had fought bravely against a common Enemy, and conquered, only because they happened to transgress the military orders of their Fathers as their Generals. Such a sentence *Saul* passed upon his Son *Jonathan*, though the people rescued him, and very justly, from suffering by it. Such another

ther *Manlius Torquatus* the *Roman* *Dictator* passed up-  
on his Son, for fighting successfully, but contrary to  
his orders, and it was executed upon him. These  
were instances of severe discipline, but still it was dis-  
cipline; and the Law of arms, and necessity of obey-  
ing orders justified the severity of Parents even towards  
their best children.

HOW much more should Parents be willing to give  
up children to any legal punishment, who contain  
themselves within the bounds of no Laws, but live  
without any fear of God or regard of Man? To in-  
dulge such children, and to excuse them from the  
lash, is to hatch calamities for the common-wealth. I  
do not believe there is a greater fountain of publick  
miseries, than the loose education of the children of  
superior (and governing Families, who by flatteries  
and fond treatment are taught to think, that they are  
above the Laws of religion and virtue: For no other  
reason, but because they are more out of the reach  
of common punishments than lesser people. But when  
will this inveterate Evil be remedied? We see that  
even *David* was not innocent of this fond indulgence;  
who though he was a Prophet, yet could not foresee  
that which almost any one might have foretold him  
without a spirit of Prophecy, that he must never ex-  
pect any good from this Son, after he had so basely  
assassinated his Brother.

FOR there are some sins so crying and enormous,  
that however the Sinner may escape the pains of death,  
yet they so despoil him of all virtue and goodness,  
they so banish the Spirit of God from him, they ren-  
der him so unblest, unhappy, unfortunate in the ad-  
ministration of affairs, that he should never be en-  
trusted with them, but live in a state of sequestration,

and do penance in the loss of such countenance, society, honours and imployments, as ought to be the distinguishing ornaments of the innocent and the virtuous.

DAVID was too indulgent a Father; but yet I believe it was not his natural affection only, which caused him so sadly to lament the death of *Absalom*. There was a deeper root of this bitterness, which I hinted at in the beginning, *viz.* the judgment of God for his cruelty to *Uriah*, *that the sword should never depart from his house*, but that out of his own Family an evil one should arise, who should retaliate his injuries. This he must see fulfilled upon him in this Son *Absalom*. And no doubt but *David* bore this sentence in mind, and was continually applying it in the course of this rebellion. And seeing how manifestly God had laid this burthen upon him, in the tragical end of two of his children, it mightily afflicted his Spirit, and he would gladly have fallen a sacrifice for his own sin, if thereby he might have expiated it, and have released his posterity from any farther obligation to pay the debt of it.

THIS I take to be the reason why those Psalms which he composed on this occasion, are so penitential, and why, in some passages of them, he begs so earnestly of God to remember his former loving-kindness and mercy towards him; and to blot out those sins and offences of his younger days which had embittered his comforts, and mingled his drink with weeping. This is the reason why he expresses so much satisfaction which he found in the confession of his sins to God, and the inestimable blessing of peace in the pardon of them. Briefly, this is the ground of his instructive Lessons and counsels to others, that in departing

parting from God they would plunge themselves into an ocean of sorrows: and that the only way to be surrounded by his mercies, is to abide in his fear and love: that *light springeth up to the righteous, and joyful gladness to such as are true-hearted.*

LET us hearken to the words of this man of great experience, and learn of him the causes of prosperity and adversity. Let us hear how he complains of the panting of his heart, the failure of his strength, the dimness of his eyes, the revolt of his friends, the strangeness of his relations and acquaintance; and what apprehensions he expresses of danger from the power, the rage, the snares of his Enemies. And yet he was endued with an extraordinary measure of wisdom and courage; he had great skill in war, he had great outward means to help himself. But he esteems them all as empty, vain, and ineffectual, without the blessing of God: By whose help he often boasts that he was able to do every thing, even when naked and destitute of outward assistance; of the truth of which he alledges his frequent experience. And knowing that the divine favour and blessing could not be lost, but by some transgression of God's Law, he therefore constantly imputes his misfortunes to his sins, especially to those grievous ones committed in the case of Uriah. These were the clouds which obscured his light, the mire which sunk him, the wounds which would not suffer him to take his rest.

WE have heard how sin was the cause of *David's* misfortunes, and the sting of his afflictions. If we would avoid the like doleful effects, let us refrain from the like provocations. For *if these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* If God spared not so great a King, who had fought his battles,

ties, and vindicated his honour upon all occasions; and who was moreover a most devout Prophet, and Author of the greatest part of the Prayers and Praises of the Church, if God visited his iniquity with such a rod, and his sin with such scourges as we here read of, what may those expect who have *David's* sins, with little or nothing of his merits to balance them?

WELL, such, and far greater Sinners have passed through the World with much lighter correction. I will rest in the example of *Absalom* here before us, who was wholly wicked, and yet smarted but little for it. For his easie exile with the King his Grand-father for the murder of his Brother, and his death by the hand of *Joab* for all his horrid attempts against his own Father, were punishments which bore no proportion to the greatness of his crimes. And the same may be said of the greatest of Sinners in all ages and parts of the World.

WHAT then? Shall we presume to say, that God's anger against sin is not always the same? That be far from us; for then how should the Judge of all the earth do that which is right? But such different dispensations are an infallible proof of a future state of rewards and punishments; whence we may vindicate the justice of God thus: That he gives impenitent Sinners their portion of good things in this life, and their evil things in that which is to come: But on the contrary he corrects the misdoings of his own children here, that he may fit and prepare them for his family in the Kingdom of Heaven. And this was exactly *David's* case: He sinned, but God would not suffer him to continue in sin, but held the rod over him, and kept up in him a Spirit of Holiness and Virtue. The divine corrections filled him with prayers,

and

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and deliverances with praises, which make up that Book of *Psalms* whereby God is daily glorified throughout the Church militant on earth, and which have raised this great King and eminent Prophet to be a Chief in the spiritual *Canaan*, a sweet *Psalmist* in the Choir of God's Temple not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens. Unto which may our gracious Father vouchsafe to bring us all, by such a discipline as he sees most convenient for us, through Jesus Christ our Lord; To whom &c.

CONCLUDING



## SERMON



# S E R M O N L X I I I .

*On the Seventh Sunday after TRINITY.*

M O R N I N G .

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2 S A M. xxi. 1.

*Then there was a Famine in the days of David, three years, year after year: And David enquired of the Lord; and the Lord answered, It is for Saul and for his bloody House, because he slew the Gibeonites.*



HE Substance of the History before us is this. Presently after the Rebellion of *Absalom* and the Sedition of *Sheba* the son of *Bichri* were ended, there begun a grievous Famine in the Land of *Canaan*, by reason of an extraordinary drought, which continued for three years together. For that part of the World is as apt to suffer by the want of rain, as we are by the excess of it. Which was the cause, I suppose, why King *David* might pass over the first and second years of Drought, as proceeding from the constitution of the Air, without any special hand of God in it. But when he had suffered the loss of two

Harvests,

Harvests, and beheld the same fate threatening the third, then he took it for an infallible token of God's high displeasure, and consulted the Oracle of the Sanctuary, what should be done to appease him. The Answer of God was, that he inflicted this judgment on account of the unjust slaughter which *Israel* had made of the *Gibeonites*, in the reign of his predecessor King *Saul*. For the *Gibeonites* were a branch of the *Amorites*, the old Inhabitants of the Land, and should have been destroyed at *Israel*'s first coming into *Canaan*; but by a stratagem which they used, they obtained a grant of their lives of *Joshua* and the Elders of *Israel*, which was confirmed to them by a solemn Oath. Notwithstanding this Oath, *Saul*, in his zeal to his own People, endeavoured to root them out, and did actually cut off great numbers of them. This breach of Faith was a great dishonour to God, by whose awful name *Israel* had sworn to spare the lives of these men; and therefore God scourged the Transgressors with a long famine, for such their perjury and murder.

*DAVID* being made sensible of this, sends for the injured *Gibeonites*, and confers with them about their sufferings, and asks them what satisfaction they demanded for the wrong that had been done them. They answered, that they desired neither Silver nor Gold, nor the life of any *Israelite*; but only seven men of the house of *Saul*, whom they would put to death, as a Sacrifice for the Massacre which he had committed upon their Families. *David* having heard their Demand, ordered seven of *Saul*'s posterity to be deliver'd into their hands, viz. two Sons of *Rizpah* *Saul*'s Concubine, and five Sons of his Daughter *Michal*, whom she brought up for *Adriel*, as it is said

said here, though according to our style they were but her Nephews, being the Sons of *Merab* her elder Sister, who was married to *Adriel*, as we read *1 Sam. xviii. 19.* but because *Michal* was their Aunt, and bred them up, according to the custom of the *Hebrews*, they were reputed her Sons.

THESE seven were delivered by *David* into the hands of the *Gibeonites*, who hanged them up unto the Lord, *i. e.* to appease his anger and vindicate his honour, in *Gibeab*, the City where *Saul* and his Family dwelt, to make the punishment the more remarkable and shameful: After which Execution, God sent down a seasonable Rain upon the Land, and restored it to its usual Fertility.

NOW this History thus displayed will afford us three useful Topicks for our present Discourse.

Ist, *DAVID*'s Concern for the Famine which lay upon his People.

IIIdly, THE Ground or meritorious Cause which brought this Famine upon them.

IIIIdly, THE Means which *David* used for the removal of it.

And Ist, WHEN *David* saw the long continuance of the Famine, and concluded from thence that God had a controversy with the Land on the account of some publick Iniquity, he made it his business to enquire who and what it was that had offended the Divine Majesty, and what was to be done in order to reconcile him, and obtain of him the blessing of a fruitful Season. That *David* made this enquiry by the Ministry of the High-Priest, standing, and praying, and offering Sacrifice before the Ark, according to the Law *Exod. xxviii. 30, &c.* is the general Opinion of Interpreters.

For

For though he himself was a great Prophet, yet we cannot but think that he was strictly legal in a matter of this nature, both that he might avoid the error of *Saul*, who was too forward to consult the Oracle himself, and also that he might decline the Odium of an execution which might look too favourable towards himself, and too hard upon his *Enemies*, as this in particular would have done, had the commission proceeded immediately from himself and his own single Authority.

BUT it was enough for him, in difficult cases, to ask Counsel of God, by the means of his own appointing. The Sons of *Aaron*, were consecrated to make Addresses to God for the learning of his Will; and the King was to put them upon making such Addresses, when the exigence of Affairs required it.

AND herein *David* show'd himself Pious towards God, and compassionate towards his People. When bad years were repeated, and the Famine grew very grievous, he no longer considered it as a natural event, that might happen at any time, but rightly concluded that it was God's judgment, and that it had been drawn down upon them by some publick Provocation.

THIS conclusion was founded upon the abundant Revelations which God has made of his dealings with a Sinful People; telling them that Famine, Pestilence and Sword, and other publick Calamities were his Scourges, wherewith he would chastize them when they rebelled against him.

HEREUNTO agree the Sentiments of the more considerate men of all Nations and Religions in the World; who were ever persuaded that publick Judgments were the vials of Divine wrath poured

out

out upon men for some crying Sin. We are told by the most ancient and celebrated of their Writers, that when the *Grecian* Army lying before *Troy* were consumed by a devouring Pestilence, their great Champion *Achilles* employed the Prophet *Chalcas* to enquire of the Deity what it was that had offended him, and what Sacrifice he demanded of the *Grecians* to make an atonement for their Sin. I instance in this particular, as being of greatest antiquity next to Sacred Writ, and not as though passages of this nature were hard to be met with; they may easily be found in the Writings of all Nations.

AND there is a plain reason which obliges us to interpret publick Calamities as God's Visitations for publick Sins. For Nations and Societies of Men, as they are now combined together, are not transferable from this to another World. They subsist here by virtue of the Laws and Ordinances of their respective Government, which will be useless and of no importance in a future State. And therefore the Divine Justice is concerned to render a recompence to the execution of such Laws in the State men are now in, beyond which they cannot go to be tryed or judged, and rewarded or punished as a Body Politick; their very Essence as such is dissolved and annihilated in this World.

INDEED particular Persons, of whom universals are composed, shall all appear before the great Tribunal of the last day, and receive an eternal recompence according to their works; and therefore their respective Portions here may be much better or worse than they really deserve, without any imputation on the justice of God, who will then rectifie all these seeming irregularities. But the present Nations

and

and Societies of men will then be dissolved, as I just now observed ; and therefore the Blessings or Punishments which belong to them as such, can be dispensed only in the present State.

AND thus we have divine Revelation, Consent of Nations, and the Reason and Necessity of the case to assure us, that publick Sins, whether of Impiety towards God, or Injustice towards men, must and will be punished with publick Judgments. I confess such Dispensations are not always seen ; not that they are not visible enough, but because men will not see them. Atheistical People, who abound in the World, and often fill the chief seats and high places of it, as they will not steer their course by the direction of God's Laws, so neither will they see his Arm when it is stretched out to punish ; but always impute the Calamity to some other Cause. For they consider, that if they should acknowledge the hand of God in publick visitations, their Impiety and Injustice would quickly be noted as the meritorious Cause of his Anger. And therefore they ascribe all events to Nature and Fortune and fatal Necessity, and would gladly have all men to be persuaded, that the State and Condition of things will be the same, whether Religion be more or less prevalent in any Nation.

BUT men of such Atheistical Principles, instead of being Patriots and Friends, are the greatest Enemies to their Country, both as by their own Personal Iniquities they incense the wrath of God against it, and as by their Carriage and Discourses they hinder others from acknowledging, and using proper means to appease his wrath.

THE Famine which afflicted *Israel* three years, might have continued much longer upon them, and other Judgments would probably have been added to it, had not *David*'s Piety moved him to enquire of God about it, and implore the blessing of a fruitful Season. For the end which God pursues in his Visitations of this kind, is, to bring Sinners to the acknowledgment of some crying Sin, to oblige them to put it away, and to make an Atonement for it by a serious Repentance: if this end be not obtained, he turns not away from his Anger, but his afflicting Hand will be stretched out still, until the People whom he visits see his Rod, and for what he has appointed it. *David* was very sensible of this: and therefore like a gracious Prince and careful Father of his People, he enquires into and discovers the true cause of the Famine under which they groaned, and takes such a method as God directed, for the satisfying his Justice, and removing his Judgment. This was the first thing which offered itself to our consideration. Let us now in the

11 place, LOOK into the real Ground and Meritorious Cause which brought this Famine upon *Israel*. The answer of God to *David* acquaints us, that it was owing to *Saul* and to his bloody House, because he slew the *Gibeonites*.

WHEN and in what place this slaughter was committed, the Sacred Historian has not recorded. It is the Opinion of *Abarbinel*, a Jewish Commentator, that the place was *Nob*, a City of the Priests, and the time then when *Doeg* the *Edomite* informed King *Saul*, that he saw *David* there with *Abimelech* the Priest, who gave him Entertainment: Whereupon *Saul*, in a mad rage, caused not only the Priests, but all

the

the Inhabitants of *Nob*, and the very Beasts belonging to it, to be slain with the Sword, as we read *1 Sam. xxii.* And if any *Gibeonites* dwelt there, as *Abarbinel* thinks, they certainly suffered the same Fate. But I am far from thinking that this was the only time that *Saul* fell upon the *Gibeonites*. For it is said in the verse following my Text, that *Saul* sought to slay them in his Zeal to his own People; *i. e.* he thought he did a very popular act by gleaning them from among the Tribes of *Israel* and *Judah*; to whom by this means he hoped to endear himself, and establish the Kingdom in his own Family. But now this slaughter of the Priests which he committed at *Nob*, was so horrid a Massacre, and so odious to the *Israelites*, that the Officers of his Guards refused to fall on when he commanded them, and none but *Doeg* was hardy enough to execute it. I conclude therefore, that it was not now, or at any one time, but gradually and upon various Occasions, that *Saul* attempted to extirpate the *Gibeonites* from among his own People.

TO make a just estimate of the greatness of his Sin in so doing, we must look back to the ninth Chapter of *Joshua*, where we find that the Inhabitants of *Gibeon*, having heard how easily the *Israelites* had reduced the strong Cities of *Jericho* and *Ai*, and knowing themselves that they were part of the devoted Nations that were to be destroyed without Mercy; they consulted together how they might save themselves by a Stratagem; which was this; they chose out several of the gravest and wisest of their men, and sent them as Ambassadors to *Gilgal*, to treat an Alliance with *Joshua* and his People: They were to pretend, that they came from a Country very re-

mote from the borders of *Canaan*; and that they might induce the *Israelites* to believe them, they were furnished out with every thing that was old and stale, as dry and mouldy Bread, old Wine-bottles, clouted Shoes, tattered Coats, and the like. In this Equipment they arrived in the *Jewish Camp*, and being brought before *Joshua* and the Governors, they declared their business, *viz.* How the *Gibeonites*, a very distant Nation, having heard of the wonderful things which God had done for *Israel*, both in *Egypt* and in their way to *Canaan*, and how he had given them this Land for an Inheritance, they much rejoiced at it, and desired to be received as their Confederates. The *Israelites* examined them about their Country, and told them that perhaps they were *Canaanites*, and then it was not in their power to make a League with them, being forbidden by the Law of their God to do it. To satisfie them in this, the *Gibeonites* desired them to observe their Furniture and Provisions, which were all new at their first setting out, and were grown thus old by the length of the Journey. With this answer the *Israelites* were satisfied, and made a peace with these men, without consulting the pleasure of God about it, as they used to do in difficult cases. *Joshua*, and *Eleazar* the High-Priest, and the Council of the Elders sware unto them, that they would esteem them as their Friends and Allies, and not suffer their People to commit any hostile act against them.

THREE days after this, *Israel* in their march came to the Cities of these *Gibeonites*, and fully understood that they were *Canaanites*. Whereupon the common Soldiers murmured at their Officers for making a league with them, because they were hereby debarred

debarred of the Spoils which their Cities would have afforded. But *Joshua* conferring with *Eleazar* and the Elders, answered the People, *We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel; now therefore we may not touch them; lest wrath be upon us, because of the Oath which we sware unto them.* Then he called the *Gibeonites*, and having reproved them for prevaricating with him, he told them that he would maintain the Faith which he had sworn to them: but for a punishment of their fraud, *they should be Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water, for the service of the Tabernacle;* which was indeed a laborious, but a very commendable and worthy Employment.

THUS *Joshua* protected the *Gibeonites* from the fury of his own Soldiers; and afterwards, like a faithful Ally, marched with his whole Army, and rescued their Cities from the Siege of five Kings of the *Canaanites*, who had confederated against them because they had made a League with *Israel*, as we read *Jos. x.*

WE see here what an Obligation the *Israelites* laid upon themselves to spare the *Gibeonites*; and the League which was made between them, was held sacred and inviolable, till *Saul* broke through it. But before we can make a due estimate of his Sin in violating it, we must endeavour to answer three Exceptions, which may be made to the validity of the Oath which *Joshua* and *Israel* made to the *Gibeonites*.

1. Whether an Oath obtained by such fraud be binding.
2. Whether it was not made void by an Antecedent Obligation.
3. How it could be binding to their Posterity.

TO the first I answer, That a promissory Oath shall bind him that makes it, though obtained by

Fraud, if the Matter of it be lawful. For he should have taken care to have discovered the Fraud, before he bound himself with the Oath. But if through his weakness or negligence, a Fraud has past upon him, yet he shall rather sustain the damage of it, than profane the awful name of God to relieve himself. In this case we may apply that rule of Holy Scripture, *Let God be true, and every man a Lyar.* If all the World cheats us, we must resolve to maintain the Reverence and Sanctity of God's name. The Princes of *Israel* knew very well that they had been circumvented by the *Gibeonites* stratagem, to their own disadvantage; but they told their People they had no power to touch them, *because*, said they, *we have sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel.*

TO the second Exception, That this Oath seems null and void by virtue of a former Law which God gave to *Israel*, that they should make no league with any of the old Inhabitants of *Canaan*; I confess there are several passages in the Books of *Moses*, which speak very positively to this purpose; and if they prove absolute Commands, then nothing less than a new Revelation or Concession from God himself, could make such a League valid, though confirmed by the most solemn Oath; because the first Law must stand good, till mollified or abrogated by the same Authority. But the *Jewish* Doctors are generally of Opinion, that their fore-fathers were at liberty to spare any of the devoted Nations, provided they would renounce their Idolatry, and embrace the Worship of the true God, and pay tribute. *Maimonides* and *Moses Kotzenfis* say, that the Law, *Deut. xx. 10. When thou comest nigh to a City to fight against it, first proclaim peace to it*, was to be observed towards *Canaanites*

naanites as well as others; though some Jews are of a different Opinion. However, this is most certain, that the most ancient Jews held it lawful to spare Canaanites in some Cases, as we are certified not only from this History of the Gibeonites, but likewise in the case of *Rahab the Hurlot*, and of many *Amorites*, *Hittites*, and others, remaining in *Israel* to the days of *Solomon*, whom that King woul<sup>d</sup> not destroy, though he was powerful enough to do it, but only levied a tribute of Bond-service upon them, 1 Kings ix. 21. Nay the *Gergesites*, who surrendered to *Israel* at their first coming into *Canaan*, had a Posterity remaining even to the time of our Blessed Lord, Matt. viii. 28. We see then that the *Israelites* were not so peremptorily obliged to destroy the *Canaanites*, but that upon some conditions they might spare them, and therefore an Oath to that purpose was justly binding.

TO the third Quere, Whether the Oath of one Generation of Men shall bind their Successors, I answer, Not in all Cases; but there were two reasons why this Oath should be binding to Posterity: 1. Because it was made a part of their Law, and therefore became obligatory to *Saul*, as much as it was to *Joshua*. 2. Because it was the security given to the *Gibeonites*, that they might dwell with *Israel* in Peace and Safety; which must in reason be extended to their Posterity, otherwise it would not have been worth their while to have solicited for, or complied with the aforesaid League.

AND thus we have found that *Joshua* had power to make a League with the *Gibeonites*, and ratifie it with an Oath; and that the same League and Oath were equally binding to *Saul*, as they were to *Joshua*.

And therefore we conclude, that *Saul*, by slaying and labouring to extirpate the *Gibeonites*, involved himself and his People in the guilt of Perjury and Murder.

AND it was so much the more inexcusable in *Saul* to commit this Violence, because it lookt as if he was resolved in all things to contradict the Sacred Law. When he was commanded utterly to destroy *Amalek*, he spared their King and their Cattle, which he should have destroyed. When he was forbidden to slay the *Gibeonites*, he employed all the power he had, to extinguish them. By which hardness and contempt of God's Word, he left a heavy reckoning to be satisfied by his own Posterity, as we shall now see, by considering in the

III<sup>d</sup> and last place, the Means which *David* used for the removal of the Famine. He delivered two of *Saul*'s Sons and five of his Grandsons into the Hands of the *Gibeonites*, who hanged them up unto the Lord, *i. e.* to appease his Anger, and vindicate his Honour, in *Gibeah* of *Saul*, *i. e.* his hereditary Town, to aggravate the reproach and scandal of their Sufferings.

NOW here it will presently be demanded, Where is the justice of hanging up the Children for the iniquity of their Parents, so expressly contrary to the Jews Law, *Deut. xxiv. 16.* where it is said, *The Fathers shall not be put to death for the Children, neither shall the Children be put to death for the Fathers: every Man shall be put to death for his own Sin.* And this is vouched by the practice of *Amaziah* King of *Judah*, who when he executed his Servants, who had assassinated King *Jehoash* his Father, he spared their Children in reverence to this Law, *2 Kings xiv. 6.*

BUT

BUT it is as easie to answer this objection as to make it: For this Law was enacted to regulate the proceedings in the ordinary Courts of Justice, but not to tye up the hands of the Almighty in extraordinary Cases. It was very reasonable that bounds should be set to human Passions, and that Men should not carry their revenge farther than the person of the Offender; but God, who is the supreme Legislator, is free to make the exception when he pleases, according to that prerogative which he has reserved to himself of visiting the iniquities of the Fathers upon the Children. And this Execution of *Saul's* Sons by the *Gibeonites* being directed by him, is a matter of special Revelation, and therefore a just exception from the general rule aforesaid.

I confess the words of the Sacred Text say nothing of God's Direction about this Execution, but only that *David* delivered seven of *Saul's* Sons to the *Gibeonites*, upon their demand of that Number. But I think we may fairly collect from the scope of the Words, that God directed the whole Affair. For as soon as *David* returned from enquiring of God, he presently called the *Gibeonites*, and askt them what would satisfie them so far, that they would forgive his People, and pray for them. In which we cannot doubt but he followed the instructions which God had given him, otherwise it would have been strange to leave it to them to take what Revenge they saw fit. *Josephus* says expresly, that God commanded *David* to refer this to the *Gibeonites*. And if so, I will venture to add, that he put it into their Hearts to make such demand as they did. And so the whole Dispensation was of God, who signified his acceptance of what was done, by sending Rain presently after

after it, and granting a plentiful encrease of the fruits of the Earth.

NOW the Application which we are most naturally led to make of what has been said, is briefly this. Let us, in all our worldly Affairs, be very careful, and very well advised, how we contract for, or promise any thing upon Oath; that the matter of it may not only be lawful, but likewise expedient for us, that so we may be under no Temptation of breaking Faith, or performing less than we have promised. The happy circumstances of expediency and advantage will make us most safe and easie under such an Obligation. But if at any time we are called to give the security of an Oath in a lawful Matter, which is in our power to perform, though we should afterwards discover great hardships which we have brought upon our selves, either through our own inadvertency to the terms of it, or the unfair dealing of those to whom it is made, yet let us pay that honour and reverence to the awful name of God which we called upon, as for his sake to keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right. Let us not be tempted, by our own loss and our adversary's gain, to make shipwreck of that which is the only true comfort of Life, I mean a good Conscience; which when we have lost, we are continually obnoxious to God's Indignation, who if he should spare us in our own Persons, yet he can punish us, as he did *Saul*, in our Posterity; for this, we see, is one of the Sins of Parents which God visits upon their Children. And therefore as we tender the Welfare of our present and future Descendents, let us abstain from Falshood and Wrong, doing violence to no Man in Body, Goods, or Name, as knowing the Judgments of God against them

them who are so injurious; but constantly maintain Faith and a good Conscience towards all Mankind, rememb'ring the encouragement which *David* gives to the righteous Man, that *he never saw such a one forsaken, nor his seed begging their Bread*; and that whatever damage he may sustain by a religious observance of his Oath, yet he shall gain this advantage by it in the end, that he shall ascend far above this faithless World, and for ever dwell in the presence of the God of Truth and Justice. To whom, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be all Honour, &c.





# SERMON LXIV.

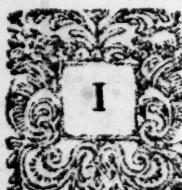
*On the Seventh Sunday after TRINITY.*

E V E N I N G.

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2 SAMUEL xxiv. 10.

*And David's heart smote him after he had numbered the people: and David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.*



N the two former Chapters we find King David represented like a glorious Sun, hastening to go down in a bright and clear Sky. He sings his last and largest Psalm of Praise to God, for his manifold Blessings and Deliverances vouchsafed him, and for granting peace and safety in all his borders. He had a great many wise and valiant men about him, who looked like very probable instruments in God's hands of maintaining the present happy Establishment, and securing a peaceable possession of the Throne to his Son and Successor, under whose government *Judah* might be saved, and *Israel* dwell safely.

BUT

BUT behold here the sable Clouds are risen, and have spread a mournful Vail over the pleasant face of things. The King's Soul is disquieted with a tempest of guilty fears ; the Prophet adds to his affliction, by denouncing the Wrath of God ready to break out upon him ; and the People presently feel the sword of the destroying Angel upon their necks, and seventy thousand of them are struck dead with a Pestilence.

WHAT was it which brought down this heavy Judgment upon them, and so suddenly turn'd their light into darkness, and their life into death ? This is intimated in my Text, and must be collected from other parts of this History. *David's heart smote him, because he had numbered his people.* Was it then so heinous a crime in him to order his Captains to return him a List of all the men that bare arms under them, that he might know the strength of his Kingdom ? Is not this commonly done by all Princes of the Earth : and might not he do it as well as they ?

THAT we may truly discover the particular circumstance wherein this Action of *David* offended God, let us enquire into two things.

I. WHAT was the impulsive cause or spring which moved *David* to number his People.

II. WHAT was the final cause, or end and design which he had in numbring them. And

I. FOR the spring and motive which incited *David* to number his People, we must look back to the beginning of this chapter, where it is said, *that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and that he moved him to do it.* Now what sin it was whereby *Israel* had provoked God to anger against them, we shall

shall consider presently. But whatever it was, this is certain, that God could not be the Author of *David's* sin. Whether it consisted in the act of numbering the People, or in some circumstance which attended this action, as facts of an indifferent nature become sinful according as they are circumstantiated, the sin could not be of God, but must proceed from some other Author. Who that Author was, we are informed in another view which is given us of this matter, *1 Chron. xxi.* where it is plainly and roundly asserted, *that Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number them.*

THIS word *Satan*, which signifies an *Adversary*, cannot be understood of any of *David's* Counsellors; for *Joab* his chief Captain was utterly against it; and no body else durst have proposed it without him. We conclude therefore, that *Satan* is to be taken here in our usual acceptation of that word, for the chief of the fallen Angels, the grand enemy and accuser of Mankind, who suggested this thought to *David*, and instigated him to number *Israel*.

BUT how shall we clear up the seeming opposition which there is between these two Texts, imputing this action of *David* to such different principles? For the resolution hereof I crave leave to observe, that the LXX Greek Interpreters, and other ancient Versions understand the first Verse of this Chapter somewhat different from ours, thus: *The anger of the Lord being kindled against Israel, moved David to number them.*

NOW it will easily be granted, that wicked Men and Devils, being the Executioners of the Divine Judgments, may be called *The anger of the Lord*. That God afflicts and punishes by such instruments, is clear from

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from the testimony of his own Word. Upon this account he calls *Nebuchadnezzar his Servant*, and tells *Sennacherib* he had raised him up on purpose to lay fenced Cities in ruinous heaps. So *Attila*, King of the *Huns*, in the fifth Century of Christianity, was called *the Scourge of God*, because he ravaged most parts of Christendom with Fire and Sword. Yet none of these Kings had any design to serve God in what they did. No; they were strangers to his Will, and enemies to his Worship, and exercised their arms only to make themselves rich, powerful, and formidable in the World. But God over-ruled and directed their fury so, as to make it subservient to his Will in the punishment of Men's Sins. And therefore it might justly be called, *the wrath of God*, because it could not have broke out to the destruction of Mankind, if he had not been first provoked to withdraw his protection, and give way to it.

IN the History before us, the Anger of the Lord was first kindled against *Israel*, and then *Satan* found room for his temptation, and easily prevailed with the King to number the People.

WHEN we hear that God was angry with *Israel*, we may be sure it was for some national, crying Sin. What that Sin was, the Sacred Text hath not inform'd us. Some think it was the late Rebellions under *Absalom*, and *Sheba* the Son of *Bicbri*, in which, besides other gross violations of the divine Law, they were guilty of many outrages committed upon their Brethren, and had shed much innocent Blood, which by God's decree could not be atoned for, but by some publick judgment upon the Land where it was shed. Thus it hath happen'd among us

in

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in the days of our Fathers; scarcity, pestilence, and fire have closed the account of such Wars.

BUT perhaps there was something more of national Guilt upon *Israel*. In the xxi Chap. of this 2d of *Samuel*, we read of three years Famine inflict-ed on them for their slaughter of the poor *Gibeonites*, contrary to an ancient treaty with that People. For this the Sacred Oracle directed them to make an a-tonement; which done, their Harvests were restored. Now it is much to be suspected, that the People be-ing deliver'd from the alarms of War, and enjoying the usual affluence of their Country, which was sin-gularly great and good, gave themselves up to luxury and sensuality, as it is very common for People to do upon such changes of their circumstances; and then what imaginable Sin is there, which we may not sup-pose they committed against God? The histories of all Nations assure us, that peace and plenty, tho' blessings in themselves, are commonly abused to such a corruption of manners, as renders People intolera-ble, and arms the vengeance of God and Man against them. Instances of this kind are innumerable. I shall select one of modern date, and out of a neigh-bouring Country, written by an eye-witness, an Au-thor much esteem'd for his great judgment and ver-a-city; I mean *Philip Comines*, who wrote the History of *Charles the Bold*, the last Prince of *Burgundy*, and describes the state of the *Burgundians* just before they were swallowed up by the arms of *France* in the reign of *Lewis XI*.

‘ I think, says *Comines*, I have seen and known the greatest part of *Europe*: yet I never knew any Pro-vince or Country, tho’ perhaps of a larger Extent,

so abounding in Money, so extravagantly fine in furniture for their Horses, so sumptuous in their Buildings, so profuse in their Expences, so luxurious in their Feasts and Entertainments, and so prodigal in all respects, as these *Burgundians* were in my time. If any one think I am extravagant in my description, and enlarge too much, others my Contemporaries will be of opinion that I have rather said too little. But in short, as I have seen them in all respects the most flourishing, so I have known them quickly ruined, and left the most desolate and miserable People of any in *Europe*. Such changes God in his Providence brings to pass, that the World may know that their prosperity and adversity are wholly at his disposal.'

THIS may suffice to shew how prone we are to incense the wrath of God against us, by the abuse of our Peace and Plenty: And that such abuse was the particular Sin of *Israel*, which alienated God from them at this time, seems probable from the nature of the Judgments wherewith he proposed to correct them. For War and Famine were two of the three things which he offer'd to *David's* choice, for the expiation of his Sin. *Shall seven years of famine, says the Prophet, come upon thy land; or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies?* These are the most direct and effectual scourges to humble a Nation, when immersed in pride and luxury and forgetfulness of God.

AND thus we have seen how *Israel's* abuse of God's mercies provoked him to anger against them; and how, in pursuance of this anger, *Satan* instigated and persuaded the King to number them; which was the first thing I proposed to consider.

I now proceed to enquire,

II. WHAT was the final cause or end which David had in numbering his People.

AND since it appears from the account of it, that there was no War, nor rumour of War to alarm him, his design could be nothing else but to gratify his curiosity in seeing the strength of his Kingdom: It was a pleasure to him to contemplate his own and his family's grandeur, in having so many myriads of valiant Men at their command and service upon all occasions. This was *David's* reason for requiring an account of his forces, and his sin lay in glorying in their numbers, and placing too much confidence in them.

SOME other circumstances we may suppose concurred to aggravate this offence. *Josephus* says expressly, that the King forgot to see payment made of the tribute due to the Tabernacle at such a general muster. For which there is a plain and positive order, *Exod. xxx. 12.* *When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel, says God to Moses, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, that there be no plague among them when thou numberest them. Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and upward, shall give half a shekel for an offering to the Lord; and thou shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle; to make an atonement for your souls.* Now this half shekel a head, *Josephus* says, *David* neglected to levy and pay as is here directed. Which, if true, was a very gross omission, and most inexcusable in him, who having studied the divine Law very constantly and carefully, as he testifies in his own *Psalms*, could not be ignorant of this part of it.

BESIDES

BESIDES, it does not appear that the Rulers of *Israel* ever muster'd their People, but for some evident and very good reason, chiefly to oppose invasions, or shake off the tyrannical yoke of their Oppressors: And in such exigences they proceeded with great solemnity; they offered sacrifice, asked counsel of God, and implored his assistance and blessing upon their undertaking. Whereas for this numbering no reason is pretended but the King's pleasure, nor any religious Duty performed to consecrate the Work.

FARTHER, if there were a competent number of standing Forces at this time in *Israel*, ready for any sudden occasion of War, then there was the less need of making such a strict scrutiny, to know what men every particular family could furnish. But that there were myriads of standing Forces, is the persuasion of learned Men. And they give this as the reason why there is such a difference between the two lists in 2 *Sam.* xxiv. and 1 *Chron.* xxi. In the former, say they, the regular troops were omitted; in the latter they were reckon'd with the rest of the People. This may very well be so, if those forces we read of 1 *Chron.* xxvii. who waited on the King by monthly courses, were settled at this time in that number and order.

WE may not, after all, exactly discern the most material aggravations of *David*'s offence in numbering his People; the silence of the Scripture having left us to uncertain conjecture: But that it was an enterprise contrary to Religion and good Reason, is manifest from the answer of *Joab* the chief Captain, when he was put upon this service. For tho' his general character shows him to have been a Man of no very tender Conscience, yet here in this case he remonstrates

against numbering of the People, as fully as his duty and respect to his Prince would permit. 1 Chron. xxi. 3. his answer to the King's command was this: *The Lord make his people an hundred times as many more as they are. But my lord the king, are they not all my Lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be the cause of trespass to Israel?* Here we see, that *Joab* from the very first saw, that the numbering of the People would render them obnoxious to the Judgmen of God.

BUT *David* was not sensible of this, till the whole affair which he had given *Joab* in commission was transacted; which took up the space of nine months and twenty days. At the end of which he and his subordinate Captains returned from their progress over the whole Land, and gave up the number of the People to the King in *Jerusalem*. Which when *David* had received, *his heart smote him*, i. e. he had a violent convulsion and remorse of Conscience for what he had dene: As it commonly happens to unadvised Men, whose Lust transports them beyond their Reason. When their passion has spent its force, and they review their actions with the eyes of sober Sense and unprejudiced Judgment, then they cry out with *our* mistaken Prince, 'Would God I had never meddled with this business; I have acted very foolishly; I wonder how I could be guilty of such an error! I would be glad to give any thing, if I could but reverse it, and so abolish it, as if it had never been done.'

SUCH was *David's* remorse upon his receiving that List of his People, which he had set his heart so much upon at the first. Nothing more desireable in prospect; nothing more odious in the review.

Some

Some of our Interpreters think that this pang of Remorse came not upon him, till he heard the denunciation of God's Judgment from his Prophet. *For*, says our Version, *when he was up in the morning, next after the report of the number had been made to him, his prophet Gad came from the Lord, to offer him his choice of three sorts of visitations for the punishment of his sin.* And indeed, if it were necessary to render the conjunction *for*, which couples these words to my Text, we could not avoid the inference, that *David* had no sense of his Sin, till he heard of the punishment of it by his Prophet. But the original *Hebrew*, and *other Versions*, and the parallel place in the *Chronicles*, read thus, *And David's seer came to him in the morning;* which leaves us room to conclude, that he was aware of his Sin, and felt the sting of it in his Conscience, before the Prophet came to reprove him for it.

WE need not make a difficulty to suppose, that such a Man as *David* should discover such an error as this, without a Monitor. Whether he had neglected to see a levy made of the half Shekel for the Tabernacle, or omitted to offer up Prayers and Sacrifices before he set about this Work; or found his Heart too much lifted up with the contemplation of his mighty Forces; whether he offended only in one, or in all these particulars; the wonder is how *David* could continue to act three quarters of a year out of his true Character, and not perceive it: For 'tis well known to have been his general practice, that he perused the Law of God with great pleasure and affiduity, perhaps above any other mortal Man, and made himself perfectly acquainted with it, and regulated his life by the directions of it. So that he was a

Prophet of the first rank, and able to teach the Law of God to others, who esteem'd themselves great proficients in it.

IN the next place, he was a singular Monument of God's Favour and Protection, being by the Divine Appointment anointed King over *Israel*, when he was but a poor young Shepherd, and carried to that dignity by the Hand of God thro' such dangers and hardships as seemed insuperable. And lastly, no Man more abounded in acknowledgments that the issues of all affairs are in the hand of God, that shield and spear, sword and bow avail nothing without his Assistance; that he raises up the obscure, and throws down the mighty, and is continually ordering things so, as may convince the World, that *salvation is of the Lord*. His Book of *Psalms* is full of such confessions as these. But what need I refer to the whole Book, when we have such an ample proof of what I am asserting, but two Chapters before my Text? It was but a little before the disaster we are now speaking of, that this great Man was exercising his humility and self-denial, ascribing all his successes to the Power and Goodness of God.

AND is this the Man who strengthens himself in his Riches, and glories in the multitude of his Forces? He who but just now was celebrating God for his Shield, his Buckler, his Fortress and Deliverer, who girded him with strength to the Battle, and gave him the necks of his Enemies; can he now put his trust in man, and take man for his defence, and in his heart depart from the Lord? This was an affection of mind so contrary to *David's* true temper, that as soon as he was sensible of it, he abhor'd it, and could not forgive himself for entertaining it; His Heart smote him

for

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for what he had done, and forced him to cry out,  
' Lord, I have sinned, I have sinned exceedingly; I  
' beseech thee, lay not this iniquity to my charge, for  
' I have acted very foolishly.'

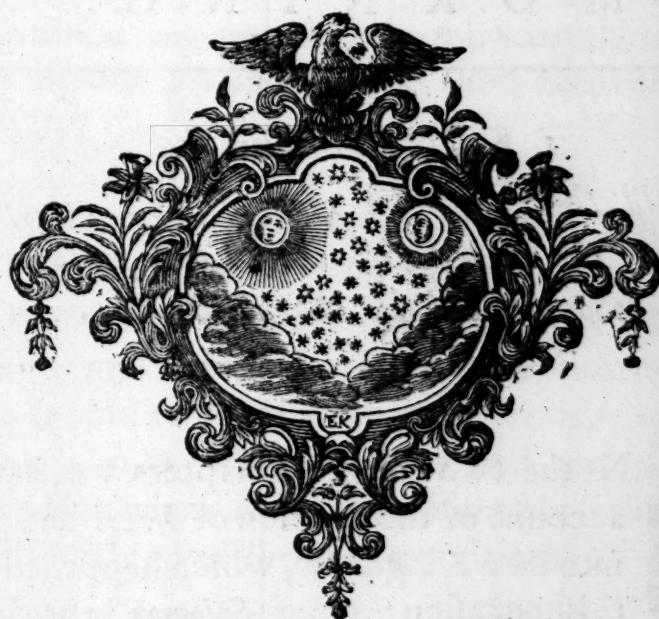
THIS should be a warning to us all, to keep our Hearts with all diligence, that we be not overcome with the love of worldly things. For if these things could break into the Heart of such a holy man as *David*, who generally guarded against them; what victories will they be apt to gain over us who are not so vigilant? Too often, alas! do they alienate us from the love of God, and provoke him to punish us with the want even of necessary things, when we have been so ungrateful as to dishonour our supreme Benefactor with those temporal Blessings, which he has bestowed upon us.

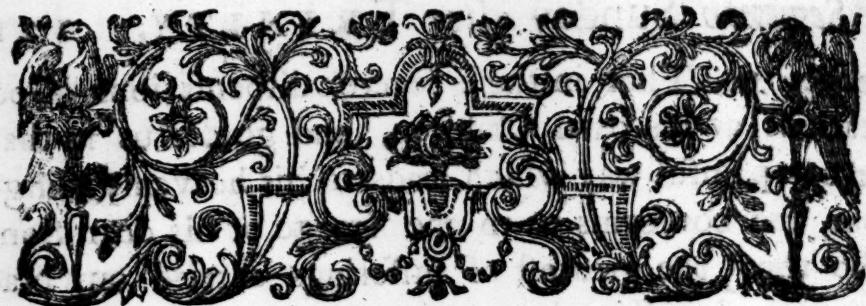
IT is not to be doubted but that many of the scourges which we smart under, are inflicted upon us for that perverse use which we make of the good things we enjoy. The design of God in bestowing them upon us, is to contribute to our real happiness; to teach us to enjoy them moderately, and to do good to others by a charitable communication of them, and to praise and glorify him who is the Giver of them. But we are too prone to cross and contradict all these ends of our Prosperity. When we are exalted to the pinnacle of honour, we often lose our understanding; we forget our selves, and grow proud, insolent, and unmerciful towards others. When riches increase, our sensual lusts and corrupt manners commonly increase in proportion with them. When we dwell securely in full peace and health, we put away the evil day far from us, living as if we were never to die, nor appear before God to give an account of our

Works. What shall we say? If we could comprehend the different states of all Nations in one view, I believe we should find none of their felicities to be long-lived. For how many ages soever they might continue as Nations, yet they have never been free many years together from some publick grievance in their Government, or some war, famine, pestilence, or the like; stroke from the hand of God; which are owing to the general ill state of Religion and Virtue in the World. Men are so apt to provoke God with their corrupt manners, especially when they are most at ease and leisure, that if he will maintain any authority, reverence, or reputation of governing amongst them, he must frequently chastise them for their enormities. And constant experience teaches, that this is the best way of governing, Men being much apter to seek after God in adversity, than in prosperity. Even this great and good King we are speaking of, confesses that the divine Corrections always conduced to his improvement, and his History shews that his greatest Sins were the fruits of his ease and security.

LET us then, when we fare well in body and estate, be more particularly concern'd for the welfare of our Souls, considering how rare it is for a Man to be happy in all these respects at one time: Let us often descend into our selves, to root out those noisome weeds of Pride, Atheism, and Sensuality, which so commonly grow luxuriant in the sun-shine of prosperity. And whenever our heavenly Father is pleased to exercise us with afflictions, let us not so much apply for the removal of them, as for his Grace to improve them to the sanctification of our Nature; let us comfort our selves with arguing as the Gospel teaches

teaches us, That in these severe dispensations God treats us as his own Children, and guides us in that narrow painful way which leads to his heavenly Kingdom, and conforms us to the Image of his dear Son, who thro' the greatest of sufferings carried our Nature into that Kingdom, where he hath glorified it, and reigns in it with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, &c.





# S E R M O N L X V.

*On the Eighth Sunday after TRINITY.*

M O R N I N G.

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I K I N G S xiii. 1.

*And behold there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel, and Jeroboam stood by the Altar to burn Incense.*



N the two former Chapters we have an account of the division of *Israel* and *Judah* into two Kingdoms, which happened upon this occasion: King *Solomon*, though he was a Prince of incomparable wit and learning, yet he committed two fatal errors in his Government, which very much lessened him in the esteem and love of God and Man; one was, that he married many Wives out of strange idolatrous Nations, which was expressly forbidden by the Law of *Moses*, for fear lest such marriages should bring in idolatry, as indeed they did very grossly in this case. For *Solomon* being more concerned to gratify his Wives than to please God, built

built high Places and Altars for their respective Worship, and joined with them in it, as some think; though if he did but allow them, this was enough to provoke God, as being a notorious contempt of his Law, in a case wherein his honour was most highly concerned. 2dly, Provision for these Wives obliged the King to burden many of his People with such work and service as they thought fit to exact of them, and to load others with heavy Taxes to defray the charges of their high living, and costly superstitions and sacrifices; whereby the People grew weary of his Government, and were disposed to forsake him, and to follow any new Head, who would undertake, upon probable grounds, to be their Deliverer.

SUCH were *Solomon's Errors* in Government, such as lost him the Love of God and his People, and made way for the revolt of *Israel* from his Family. For as soon as ever his reign was ended, *Israel* was resolved to treat with his successor for better usage, and made their humble application to him, that he would remit of their hard service, and unbind the heavy yoke which *Solomon* had put upon their necks. But when *Rehoboam* absolutely refused to alleviate any thing of former Impositions, all *Israel* with one voice renounced their allegiance to him, and chose *Jeroboam* for their King, who was a very valiant and very industrious Man, a great favourite of King *Solomon*, who raised him to great preferment, and set him over the whole Province of *Ephraim* and *Manasseh*, and employed him much in the ordering and directing his magnificent buildings.

THIS long concern with publick affairs gave *Jeroboam* an opportunity both to enrich himself, and also to get a great reputation for his capacity to govern;

vern; so that when *Israel* was resolved to have a new King, their eyes were with one consent turned upon him, as the fittest Person to be set at the head of them.

BUT there was another motive which induced the *Israelites* to be unanimous in their choice of *Jeroboam* for their King, and that was a Revelation which God had made long before by the Prophet *Abijah*, that the time was coming when *Jeroboam* should reign over the ten Tribes of *Israel*. This we read chap. xi. of this Book, That when *Jeroboam* was servant to King *Solomon*, one day as he went out of *Jerusalem*, *Abijah* met him in the field, and took from him a new Robe which he had just put on, and rent it in twelve pieces, bidding him take ten, as an earnest and prognostick from God, that he was about to rend ten Tribes of *Israel* from the house of *David*, and would give them to *Jeroboam* to reign over them. And he tells him what it was that had provoked God to do this: *Because*, says he, *Solomon and his House have forsaken me, and worshipped Ashtaroth, and Chemosh, and Milcom; and have not walked in my Statutes to do that which is right in my eyes.* Therefore I will take ten Tribes from his Son, and will give them to thee, and thou shalt be King over *Israel*. And if thou wilt bearken to all that I command thee, and wilt keep my Statutes, as *David my servant did*, then I will build thee a sure house, as I built for him, and will give *Israel* unto thee.

NOW though we must suppose that an affair of this nature was cautiously and privately transacted between *Abijah* and *Jeroboam*, as indeed their safety required, being both subjects to King *Solomon*, yet it was not long a secret: *Solomon* quickly knew of it, and

and banished *Jeroboam* upon that account; which was but the way to make it more publick, and we cannot doubt but all *Israel* was apprized of it; which caused them, at *Solomon's* decease, to send for *Jeroboam* out of his Banishment, and to fulfill the Prophecy, by making him their King.

WE have heard, that the reason why the Kingdom of *Israel* was rent from the House of *David*, was the Polytheism or variety of superstition introduced by *Solomon's* Wives, and countenanced by himself. This was fully declared to *Jeroboam*, with a caution given him to avoid the like Impiety, and a promise brought him from God, that if he would walk in his ways, and do that which is right in his sight, he would establish the Kingdom in his Family, and continue it to his late Posterity.

THIS makes it the more strange and inexcusable in him, to dishonour God so shamefully as he did, by one of the first acts of his Government.

FOR no sooner was he well got into the throne, but as if God had laid no manner of obligation or injunction upon him, he presently violated the Divine Laws, by the following Innovation.

IT is a well-known Command of God to *Israel*, that every year, three times a year, all their Males should go up to *Jerusalem* to offer sacrifice and to worship him. 'Now, says *Jeroboam*, if this People should continue to observe this custom, the repeated sight of their royal City, and the venerable face of Religion there, which has been established by *David* and *Solomon*, will revive in them a tender affection and esteem for that Family, to whom they will one day reconcile themselves, by making a sacrifice of me and mine.' Hereupon he advised with

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with his secular Politicians, who were nothing so much concerned for the purity of Religion, as for the preservation of their civil Government: And the result of their Counsel was this; That they would not go out of their own Tribes for the exercise of their Religion, but left it to their new King *Jeroboam* to appoint what places he pleased for the holding of their Religious Assemblies. Accordingly he ordered Accommodations to be made for them in *Dan* and *Bethel*, two Cities in the outmost coasts of *Israel*, the first in the North, and the other in the South Part of the Kingdom: Here he planted Groves, and built Altars, and erected the figures of two golden Calves in Temples which he dedicated to them, and constituted Priests of his own chusing, out of any Tribe or Family; for the House of *Aaron* and Tribe of *Levi* refused to serve him in his new model of Religion. When he had made this provision, he assembled the People together, and recommended his new Constitution to them in the following Oration, as *Josephus* represents it.

‘ My Friends, I presume you are not ignorant, ‘ that the Deity fills all Places, and cannot be circumscribed or confined in one more than another; but ‘ is every where present with his devout Worshippers, ‘ hearing their Prayers, and accepting their Services. ‘ For which reason I think we may well dispense with ‘ the charge and trouble of journeys to *Jerusalem*, a ‘ City not only at a great distance from us, but now ‘ become our mortal Enemy. For what is their celebrated Temple, but the work of Men’s Hands? ‘ We all remember the building of it. I had as ‘ much power to consecrate two Golden Calves, as ‘ I have done, to be Emblems of the Deity, which

‘ I have placed in *Dan* and *Bethel*, that you may resort to either of these places for divine Worship, according as they shall happen to be nearest to your Habitations. And that you may not cry, who shall give us of the Sons of *Aaron*, and Tribe of *Levi* for the service of our Altars, I will authorize any of you to minister in Holy Things. Whosoever among you has a mind to the Sacred Function, let him but offer to God a Bullock and a Ram, as *Aaron* is said to have done at his Consecration, and he shall be qualified to become a Priest.’

BY such persuasions and pretences of convenience and advantage, *Jeroboam* diverted the ten Tribes of *Israel* from going up to *Jerusalem*, at the times appointed by the Divine Law. And though his reasoning himself into this Innovation, as we heard before, betrayed his distrust of God, who had solemnly engaged to prosper him in case he would keep his Laws, and upon whose promise he had the greatest reason to depend, as knowing that it was God who had raised him to be King; yet we can give some account of this Conduct; we see the worldly Politician in it; we know it is very agreeable to their ways, who leave God, and follow their own understanding in providing for themselves.

BUT to me it seems wholly unaccountable why he should erect the figures of Golden Calves in his new Temples. For besides the impropriety of that Figure, so far as I can guess, to represent any thing that is Divine, one would think the *Jews*, who must needs know from *Exod.* xxxii. what happened to their Fore-fathers in the Wilderness, should evermore abominate the Image of a golden Calf. And yet we see *Jeroboam* had the Confidence, not only to set them

up

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up in his Temples, but to present them to the People, in the very same form of Words which *Aaron* had presented his before. *These be thy Gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the Land of Egypt.* And the People believed him, and attested their Faith by a long course of Worship. Which is very astonishing, when we consider and must take it for granted, that they were generally well instructed in the knowledge of the true God, and knew what an infamy it brought upon the memory of their Ancestors, that *they turned the glory of the invisible God, into the similitude of a Calf that eateth hay.*

NOW at the first Feast of Tabernacles which happened after *Jeroboam* became King of *Israel*, to give reputation to this worship of his own devising, though it had been a piacular crime at *Jerusalem*, yet it was but of a piece with the new constitution at *Bethel*, that the King himself ascended up to the Altar, to perform the Office of High-priest, being attended by several inferior Priests, of no greater Authority than what they derived from him.

AND when he was just ready to offer Sacrifice, and to burn Incense in the sight of the People, a Prophet, whom *Josephus* calls *Jadon*, sent by God from *Jerusalem*, in that moment presented himself before the King, and after he had for a while looked wistfully upon him, he turned to the Altar, and thus exclaimed: *O Altar, Altar, thus saith the Lord, a Son of the House of David, Josiah by name, shall burn upon thee the bones of false Prophets, Deceivers and Seducers. And to persuade all that bear me, that this shall come to pass, Behold, this Altar shall break immediately, and the ashes and fat of the Sacrifices which it contains, shall fall to the ground.*

THIS

THIS was no sooner said than done. But *Jeroboam*, before he perceived it, being transported with indignation at the boldness of the Man, offered to lay hold of him. But the Arm which he stretcht out, was instantly struck lame, and the sinews of it so dried and contracted, that he could not pluck it in again; which gave a turn to his Passion, and caused him to beg the Prophet's Prayers to God, that his Arm might be restored to its usual Vigor and Soundness. His request was immediately granted; which obliged him so, that he was very courteous to the Prophet, and importuned him to dine with him, and accept of a Reward. But the Prophet excused himself by telling him, that God had forbidden him to eat or drink in that idolatrous City, or to return by the same way that he came. And having said this, he departed.

BUT there dwelt an old Prophet in *Bethel*, one who had been many Years a Prophet in *Israel* before this Apostasie; *Josephus* thinks he was in favour with *Jeroboam*, as dealing smoothly with him in all his Proceedings. This Man's Sons having heard and seen all that the Prophet from *Jerusalem* did to *Jeroboam* and his Altar, they came and told it in order to their Father. And he fearing lest the King should have a greater opinion of this stranger than of himself, commanded his Sons presently to saddle his *As*s; and having learned of them which way the Man of God went, he followed, and overtook him, as he was reposing himself under an Oak. After Salutations past, he told him he must needs return with him to the City, and eat Bread at his House. And when the Man of God refused for the reason aforesaid, the old Prophet answered, ' You may safely eat with me; ' for I am a Man of the same Spirit and Principles

‘ with your self, and I came after you now by the  
‘ direction of an Angel of God, who charged me to  
‘ fetch you back, and to give you some Entertain-  
‘ ment. For though you may not enter into the  
‘ House of any Idolaters, to countenance them in  
‘ their Impiety, yet I who am a Prophet of the true  
‘ God, am not comprehended in that Prohibition.  
‘ You have leave to dine with me, therefore come  
‘ back with me.’

THESE confident asseverations of the old Prophet, persuaded *Jadon* that he spoke truth, and thereupon he accepted of his Invitation. But while they sate at the Table, the word of the Lord came to the old Prophet, who in great agony and astonishment was forced to denounce to *Jadon*, that he had disobeyed the word of the Lord, and therefore should never be buried in the Sepulcher of his Fathers: which threatening was executed upon him the same day. For in the Afternoon, as he was all alone upon the Road towards *Jerusalem*, a Lion rusht out of a Wood upon him and slew him. And when he had so done, he stood very still and quiet, neither meddling with the Carcasses, nor the Ass that carried him, nor the Passengers that came that way and looked on; which shewed that this Lion had his Commission from God, which he could not exceed, being sent only to kill the disobedient Prophet, but to do no more.

WHEN the News of his death was told in *Bethel*, and came to the ears of the old Prophet, he readily acknowledged the Hand of God in it, and fetcht the Body, and with great Decency and Lamentation buried it in his own Sepulcher, charging his Sons, that when he died, they should deposite him

in the same Grave, and telling them that what he had cried against the Altar in *Bethel*, and against the Priests and High Places in *Samaria*, would surely come to pass. Which is a great argument that this old Man, however he prevaricated with *Jadon*, yet was endued with a true Spirit of Prophecy.

BUT the grievous burden of all, is the impenitence of *Jeroboam*, who like a true Politician of this World, hardened himself against all these undeniable Warnings of God, not reforming any one enormity which he had committed; but going on to make Priests of the meanest of the People, without any regard to Tribe, Family, or Condition of the Persons; but whosoever desired it, he consecrated him, and he became one of the Priests of the High Places. Which was such a flagrant dishonour of God, and contempt of his Laws, that it provoked him to send dreadful Judgments upon *Jeroboam* and his People.

AND thus we have seen in three notable instances, *Solomon*, *Jeroboam*, and *Jadon*, what account God makes of our Obedience to his Commands, and what Vengeance we may justly expect for our Contempt and Violation of them. But to enlarge them a little more:

1<sup>st</sup>, GOD promises King *Solomon*, 1 *Kings* vi. that if he would walk in his Statutes, execute his Judgments, and keep all his Commandments, *then*, says he, *I will perform my word unto thee, which I spake unto David thy Father*; which was, that he would Establish the Throne of his Kingdom for ever, 2 *Sam. vii.*  
 13. And so long as *Solomon* was the Guardian of true Religion, God was true and faithful to his promise, blessing him with immense Riches, Plenty, and Power, and making Peace in all his Borders. But when

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in his advanced years he degenerated into an Idolater and Oppressor, the bright Sunshine of his Prosperity was obscured, many Adversaries rose up against him, who gave him great disturbance; he had the mortification to hear from God by the mouth of his Prophets, that the Kingdom of *Israel* should be taken from his Son, and be given to his Servant; and lastly, he departed out of this Life under a great diminution of that Fame and Reputation, which he had acquired in the former part of his Reign.

2dly, *JEEROBOAM* was manifestly raised by the Providence of God from a low estate to be King of *Israel*, and upon condition of his Obedience had as large assurances given him of the Divine favour, as had been given to his Master *Solomon*. But he had so much of worldly Wisdom in him, that he could not trust his Creator and Benefactor. He thought he reasoned most justly, and so indeed he did, according to human views, when he restrained his *Israelites* from resorting to *Jerusalem*, and provided for their whole worship in his own Dominions: And when he persuaded them to be content, because God was Omnipresent, and as near them at *Dan* and *Bethel* as at *Jerusalem*; and that he was no Respecter of Persons, but would accept the ministry of Priests of other Families, as well as those of the Tribe of *Levi*; these were plausible Arguments, and would no doubt be urged with great vehemence by Free-thinkers and Reasoners, of any Age or Religion whatever. And for any thing I find, the *Israelites* under this new regulation, were as just and temperate, as exact in all relative Duties, and every way as moral men, as the men of *Judah*. So that if it were the whole business of Religion, as many would have it thought, to be subservient

servient only to the Welfare and good Order of Mankind, *Israel* with their New Religion might be in as good a condition, as *Judah* with their Old. But because *Jeroboam's* Institution violated several positive Laws of God, therefore the alteration which he made, is constantly imputed to him as a very heinous Sin, and such as proved very calamitous to himself and his People. For however our Libertines would have it pass for a general maxim, that mankind are born only to provide for their Temporal happiness, and that such Religion is best, whoever instituted it, which is most adapted to that end; yet we find by manifold testimonies of Sacred writ, as well as passages of other History, that God will be acknowledged and glorified by the Obedience of men; and if we pretend to treat any part of his revealed Will as a superficial matter, of no good use or advantage to us; by such a treatment we charge infinite Wisdom with weakness, we highly dishonour him, and he will severely reckon with us for the contempt.

**THERE** is no Religion but what should have the true God for its Author, as well as for its End and Object; for which reason we ought to express the greatest veneration for every thing that he has revealed to us. For will we call any thing unnecessary, or easie to be dispensed with, which God has made known this way to us? Is not He the sole Object of our worship? and is not He the fittest to prescribe the exercise and acts of our Piety, and best able to judge what will please him? It is enough for us to be satisfied that God has enjoyned us any thing as a Duty; we have no right to censure and debate the Expediency of it, but to pay it that honour which is due from the meanest Servants to the

highest Lord, and that is, to perform it with an exact and ready Obedience.

HAD this been well considered by the Prophet, who was sent of God to cry against Jeroboam's Altar in *Bethel*, he had not been our third instance of God's displeasure against Disobedience. For he delivered the Message he was sent upon, with great Courage and Constancy, in the presence of the King and all his People; and as bravely refused to accept of the Royal Present and Entertainment. But being overpersuaded by the old Prophet of *Bethel*, (who feigned he had a Revelation for it) to come to his house, he failed in that Circumstance of his Obedience, and lost his Life by it. His error was this, in neglecting God's command revealed to himself, of which he was very certain, and trusting the old Prophet about a contrary Revelation, of which he could not be certain, and which indeed proved but a Fiction. Here was his fault; and therefore it was said emphatically to him, *Because thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord*. For if God had thought fit to recall his Word, he would have intimated it to the Prophet himself: According to the rule which *Abarbinel* lays down in this case; *Nothing, says he, that a Prophet receives from God, is to be altered, unless that Prophet has another word from God revoking the former*. This is intended for a warning to us all, that we be careful to hearken to God rather than Men; and that we suffer not any confident man to argue and dispute us out of the meaning of any part of God's word, when the Sense of it is once plain and clear to us. I doubt not but the Prophet's punishment was thus memorably severe, on purpose to imprint the instruction I have recommended, upon all our Hearts. For he

was

was far less culpable than the two Kings before-mentioned ; who yet died in their beds, while he was slain by a Lion : but then his happiness above them was this, that here ended all his Punishment, both in this World and that which is to come. Thus much God caused the Lion by dumb signs to declare ; for when he had taken his Life, he neither hurt his Body any farther, nor suffered any thing else to touch it ; but stood by it as its Protector, 'till it was fetch-ed away to a decent Burial. And we have heard what a strict charge the old Prophet laid upon his Sons to bury him in the same Grave ; and we read afterwards, 2 Kings xxiii. that when King *Josiah* ful-filled his Prophecy, by burning dead mens bones up-on *Jeroboam*'s Altar, being informed which was his Grave, he suffered no man to disturb his remains ; which shewed the watchfulness of Divine Providence over him.

I shall conclude with observing how much the circumstances of this Prophecy tend to prove the Divine Authority of Holy Scripture. It is here foretold, that a Son of the House of David, *Josiah* by name, shall burn mens bones upon the Altar at Bethel. And how punctually this was fulfilled, we read in the History of *Josiah*, 2 Kings xxiii. Now between this Prediction and the accomplishment of it, there passed three hundred sixty two years. So that it was first pronounced at a time when in all human probability it could never come to pass. For *Jeroboam* was just now established King over the ten Tribes of *Isra-el*, whereby he was much Superior in military Forces to the House of *David* : And *Bethel* was a City of his jurisdiction, no ways likely to fall into the hands of the old Royal Family ; which yet must happen,

before a Prince of the House of *David* could pollute his new-erected Altar there. But what can human powers avail, when the hand of God interpolates to give them a turn? It was in the reign of this very *Jeroboam*, that *Abijah* son of *Rheboboam*, King of *Judah*, waging War with him, beat him, with just half the number of men, and took many Cities and Towns from him, and among the rest, this very *Bethel*, the City of the Golden Calf, as we read 2 *Chron.* xiii. 19. So that presently the Altar was in the power of the Kings of *Judah*, to use it as they pleased. But the decree of God was, that *Josiah* should pollute it and abolish it, who came not into the World 'till several years after *Israel* was carried into Captivity by *Salmaneser* the *Affyrian*; so that he had none of that Nation left to oppose him, or question him for what he did to it.

THIS Prediction, I say, is set forth in such particular circumstances, as nothing but the wisdom of God could delineate so long before-hand. For he alone sees things that are not, as though they were actually existing; whereas the subtlest of his Creatures can but make random conjectures at things which are much nearer the birth. This Prophecy therefore is a noble Argument, that the whole Book was written by the Inspiration of the Spirit of God; and though there are many other good uses to be made of it, which I have touched upon, yet it well deserved to be recorded, had it been for no other end, but to confirm our Faith in the Word of God.

LET us therefore praise God, for giving us such incontestable evidence, that he spake in times past

to the *Jews* by his Prophets; and much more, that he hath spoken to us Christians of these later Days by his Son, who has given us no less Demonstrations, by his foretelling of future things, that the Word of God was with him. Let this dispose us to reverence this awful Word in both Testaments, and not only to be Hearers, but Doers of it, that finally we may be numbered with the Holy Prophets and Apostles, by whom it was spoken and written, under our common Lord and Head Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth, &c.





# SERMON LXVI.

*On the Eighth Sunday after TRINITY.*

E V E N I N G.

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I K I N G S xvii. 24.

*And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.*

**A**T the end of the foregoing Chapter, we have an account of *Ahab*, the Son and Successor of *Omri* King of *Israel*, how he robbed God of his honour by multiplying Idols against him in his own peculiar Inheritance, and did more to provoke him than all the Kings of *Israel* that went before him. Whence one might easily foresee that his Reign would be full of publick calamities. And presently we hear in the beginning of this Chapter, how God sent his herald to denounce the wrath of Heaven against him. The Prophet *Elijah* goes to *Samaria*, enters the Palace Royal, and presents himself before *Ahab*, telling him he had merited so ill of the King of Heaven, that he would send him neither Rain nor Dew for some years

years to come. And to leave the stronger impression of this threatening upon *Ahab*'s mind, he confirmed what he had said with an Oath, and so departed.

THO' the time which this drought lasted, is not here determined, yet we are assured by our Blessed Saviour, *Luke* iv. and *St. James* chap. v. that it continued three years and a half. Of which Interpreters think half a year was already past at this juncture, wherein the former and the latter rain had been withheld; which *Ahab* might look upon as merely fortuitous, till *Elijah* assured him it was God's Visitation, and that this was but the beginning of it.

AS soon as the Prophet had delivered his message, he went, as God directed him, to the Brook *Che-rib*, which running between *Bethel* and *Jericho*, falls into *Jordan*. This was a convenient situation for him, partly that he might be out of the reach of *Ahab*'s indignation: For here was a Cave, which serv'd him for a hiding-place; over which *Helena*, the Mother of *Constantine* the Great, afterwards built a Chapel, in memory of the Prophet: And partly that he might drink of the Brook in the time of the Drought; for he was not exempted from the necessity of living like other Men. And because there was no human Creature near this desolate place, to order his diet for him, God commanded the *Ravens*, and they brought him Bread and Flesh every morning and evening, according to the Divine Promise and Revelation made to him before-hand: This God could have conveyed to him any other way, but he chose to send it by these rapacious Birds, for the greater illustration of his absolute command over all the Creatures, and to give us a full evidence, that

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he is able to succour and preserve by the most improbable means, all those who put their trust in him. And we need go no farther to enquire where the Ravens had this Food: It is enough if we believe that they brought it to *Elijah*; for then we must allow that they acted by the divine direction, and that it was of God's providing.

A F T E R the Prophet had spent a year in this place, the Brook dried up, and the Angel of the Lord spoke to him to remove and go to *Zarephath*, or *Sarepta*, a sea-coast Town belonging to *Sidon*, computed to be a hundred miles distant from *Cherith*: *For there, says he, I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee.*

NOW this Town belonging to *Sidon*, was out of the dominion of the King of *Israel*, and I was going to say, of a different Religion. But I observe, that *Abab's Jezebel* was Daughter of the King of *Sidon*, and that she had established the worship of *Baal* in *Israel*; and consequently this Widow of *Sarepta*, tho' not of the Seed of *Abraham*, nor within the Pale of the true Church, might be as acceptable to God as any *Israelite*; and I think our Lord gives her the preference, *Luke iv. 25. There were, says he, many widows in Israel, in the days of Elias, in the time of the great drought and famine, but unto none of them was the Prophet sent, save unto a widow of Sarepta, a town of Sidon.* Upon hearing this, the Synagogue fell into such a rage and uproar, that they would have destroy'd Christ, if he had not saved himself by a Miracle. And yet where is the cause for so much indignation, but in the preference which was suggested by this comparison, that Aliens were more deserving of the favour of God, than his own People?

*ELIJAH*

ELIJAH went to Sarepta, as he was commanded; and when he came to the gate of the City, he saw the widow woman, with whom he was to sojourn, gathering of sticks to make a Fire, I suppose in some yard belonging to her own House; for we can hardly think that they lay in common. The Prophet being weary with travel, and faint with hunger and thirst, begged of this Woman for some relief; but she answered him, that she had but one short meal left for her self and her son, which was the last they expected to eat in this world: Elijah told her, that he was a Prophet of the God of Israel, who had sent him on purpose to preserve her and her son from perishing by this Famine; and that she might safely bring him a portion of her small store, which would derive such a blessing upon the rest, that *ber barrel of meal should not waste, nor ber cruse of oyl fail, until the Lord should send rain upon the Earth.*

HEREUPON the Woman went readily and fetcht the Prophet what he demanded. Whence I conclude, that this conversation had been represented to her before-hand in a Dream. For it is said before, that the Lord had commanded her to entertain the Prophet: And it is hard to think that any thing less than a divine warning could incline her not only to give him part of her last morsel, but to take him into her house, to lodge and board there, in a time of such scarcity, that the necessaries of life were not to be had for any money. By this act of Faith, she saved her own and her son's life. For her obedience to God, and her hospitality to his Prophet, were rewarded with a miraculous encrease of her store, so as that it continued to feed them all sufficiently to the end

end of the Famine, which is computed to have lasted two years from the time that *Elijah* first came to her house.

NOW what shall we say to this Miracle? Our Atheists will certainly deny the matter of fact, and explode it as a fable, or give it some other meaning. For if they should grant that it was really done, they must allow the credibility of those other Scripture Histories, which tell us how God fed his People with *Manna* in the Wilderness by the space of forty years: And how the Son of God feasted many thousands of his followers with such a small quantity of provision, as, humanly speaking, was not sufficient to give every one of them a taste of it; and yet by the divine Power it was so augmented as to satiate the vast multitude, and left so many fragments at last, as exceeded the bulk of the first quantity. All this our Atheists will deny, and we cannot help it. But we have the comfort to know, that their hardy denials cannot undo those things which have been done. If they cannot see that there is an omnipotent God which governs the world, it is not for want of demonstrations of his Power, which it would be endless to recount, even in the common dispensations of Providence; nor for want of an Understanding in man to discern this power; but it is because they have shut their eyes, and hardened their hearts, that they may put away from them the knowledge and fear and reverence of the Almighty. But let not any of us here present follow these blind guides in their abominable ways, lest being found in their company, we be finally swallowed up of that destruction which is prepared for such audacious enemies and blasphemers

of

of God. We are as fully persuaded as if we had seen it, that by the infinite Power and Goodness of God, a handful of meal and a few spoonfuls of oil were so augmented as to serve the Widow of *Sarepta*'s family, during the many days above mentioned of a grievous Famine, until it pleased God to replenish the Earth with its usual fruits.

AND blessed be God for this wonderful instance of his care and concern for his distressed Servants. The consideration of it should strongly influence and turn our hearts to regard him as the Fountain of all Goodness, who sees our necessities, and is able to supply them in all extremities. And it should convince us, that it is our wisest course and best policy, to secure to our selves the favour of such an omnipotent Benefactor, by rendring him the homage of our Prayers, the confession of our Lips, the obedience of our whole Lives, against all the temptations of worldly fear or favour which can be offered to pervert us.

THIS Widow's example should likewise excite us to acts of Hospitality and Charity, tho' we have no such special direction to proper objects, as we suppose she had. For the general rules, and ever-bind-ing laws of our Profession sufficiently inculcate this beneficent and communicative temper. This was one of the doctrines which *John Baptist* preached, in order to prepare the way of our Lord; *Luke* iii. 11. *He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.* He doth not say, he that hath a large wardrobe, let him clothe the poor out of his cast-cloaths; but, he who hath but two coats, which are as few as even a poor man

can

can shift with ; yet if he has a Brother that is quite destitute of a Garment, let him give him one to comfort him and defend him from the cold, and trust the common Parent and Giver of all good things, for a farther supply when he wants it. At present his naked Brother wants so as to perish, if not speedily relieved ; and the giver can wait till Providence sees fit to restore it.

THE same may be said of Food. Not only the Rich people of the world, who fare sumptuously every day, should feed the poor out of their superfluities ; but even the Poor themselves should practise that mercy, which many times they loudly crave, and learn by their own sufferings to pity and impart to those who suffer more. This is natural ; whereas the generality of poor people are unnatural, churlish, self-lovers, having hands always ready to receive, but never to give ; Aliens and strangers from the Spirit of the Gospel, which obliges all Men to give upon proper occasions, and in proportion to their ability. *Be merciful after thy power*, says a good Father in his advice to his Son, *Tob. iv. 8, 9.* *If thou hast much, give plenteously. If thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little : for so gatherest thou thy self a good reward in the day of necessity.* Such a reward had this poor Widow of Sarepta for entertaining *Elijah* : And such another, I doubt not, had that other Widow mention'd in the Gospel, who threw her two mites into the treasury of the Temple. It was her all, and she trusted God with it, and was honoured with a publick testimony of the divine Acceptance : Tho' I am afraid, had she lived in these days of Infidelity, she would have been censured as a weak-headed, superstitious, melancholy Person.

SUCH

SUCH Censurers think they have reason on their side, when they say, ‘ Give us such a Prophet as *Elijah*, and we will receive him into our houses with as ready a good will as this Widow did.’ St. *Chrysostom* answers their challenge very well. ‘ I will, says he, bring you a greater, even the Lord of this Prophet, our common Saviour *Jesus Christ*.’ But how does he make this out? why from *Christ*’s own words, *Matth. xxv.* ‘ Whatever ye do to my poor brethren, the members of my mystical body, I shall esteem it as done to my self in the great day of Accounts. Those who have healed them, fed and cloathed them, ransomed them from prisons and slavery, shall be as well rewarded, as if they had been thus beneficent to my self in Person. On the contrary, those who have despised poor Christians, and shown themselves merciless and inhuman towards them, shall be dealt with as severely, as if they had exercised the same cruelty to me.’

LET us now return to the thread of our History, which tells us, that while *Elijah* lodged at the Widow of *Sarepta*’s house, her son beforementioned, and who is thought to have been her only child, fell sick and died. His mother was struck with inconsolable grief for this loss, and charged it upon the Prophet, that he had bereaved her of her son for the punishment of her sins. *Elijah*, to assure her of his sympathy in her affliction, took the child with the greatest tenderness, and carried him up to his own bed, where he prayed over him with such fervency of Spirit, that God was pleased to glorify his Prophet with a miracle, never known till this time. For the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. Then the Prophet brought the child down, and presented

him alive into his mother's arms; who seeing these eyes which lately slept in death, to own her and smile upon her, the good Woman, transported with joy and wonder, told the Prophet, he had done enough: She was now abundantly convinced *that he was a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in his mouth was truth.*

WE are not to interpret these words so, as if the speaker was now first apprized upon this occasion, that *Elijah* was a Prophet of the true God. For I observed before, that he was made known to her long ago by a special Revelation: Neither was it possible for them to live so long together upon the miraculous supply which *Elijah* had foretold and promised in the name of the Lord, without the Woman's being persuaded, that his mission was from Heaven. But the raising her son from the dead, a thing which was never heard of before, in all the world, made the strongest impression upon her mind, fill'd her with an excess of joy, and obliged her to make a more particular acknowledgment of that, which no doubt she had confess in other words before, that *Elijah's* works proved him to be a Servant of the most high and holy God.

THE Inference which we may naturally make from this History, and one great reason why it stands upon record, is this, That we may know the Ministers and Servants of God by their Works, and that their Credentials, when there is occasion for them, are of such a sort, as demonstrate their Mission to be divine.

I know very well, that the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, give us frequent and earnest warnings to beware of false Prophets, and not to be easily led away with their specious appearances of working

working miracles, for that some of them would be very plausible and surprizing. I think the world is now old enough, and full enough of Books, to furnish us with accounts of all sorts of Miracles, whether real or feigned; and I think any man of a sound Judgment and unprejudiced Mind might be trusted, and even left to himself to distinguish the one from the other. For tho' some such wonderful works as we read of in our sacred Scriptures, are said to have been done in those Countries where contrary Religions have prevail'd; yet so far as I have seen the accounts of them, they differ so widely, as to leave no comparison between the credibility of the one and the other. And that we may not go out of every ones knowledge for an instance or two, let us observe the account which *Moses* gives of his contest with the *Egyptian Magicians*. He frankly tells us, that by the power of their Magic they imitated his Miracles in several respects; for in several others they could not so much as imitate. And how poor their imitations were at the best, we may guess from the first of them, where we read how easily his Rod, turned into a Serpent, devoured all the Serpents, whether real or delusory, of the *Egyptians*. And that he was armed with a Power far superior to theirs, was proved by the issue, and by the testimony of others, as well as his own writings.

2. TO pass over the *Dagon* of the *Philistines*, and some others, let us come to the time of the Prophet *Elijah*, of whom we read in the next Chapter, that to end disputes between himself and the Prophets of *Baal*, he proposed that both sides should call upon their Gods for fire to consume a Sacrifice; and that the God who answered by fire, should be acknowledged in common, as the only true God. *Baal's Prophets*

accepted the condition, which I hardly think they would have done, had not they depended upon their Idol, from some former experience, that he would have done something for them, to have amused at least, and surprized the People. But in this competition he was restrained, and unable to do any thing at all. Whereas the God of *Israel*, upon a short application of his Prophet, sent so much fire as not only consumed the Sacrifice, but instantly dried up the water in which *Elijah* had floated it, that he might shew his Faith in his God, and render the Miracle the more conspicuous.

3. LET us proceed to the beginnings of Christianity. We read, *Acts* viii. that one *Simon* a Magician was grown famous in *Samaria*, and had so amazed the People of that City with his arts, that they gave him no less a Style than, *The great power of God*. But when the Power of Christ came among them in *Philip* the Christian Deacon, the power of *Simon* was so eclipsed and lessened, that he desired to exchange it for the other. And from thenceforth the vanity of Idols and infernal Arts was exposed before the world, and they fell like the *Philistines Dagon* before the Ark of God.

AS thus the miracles of true Prophets have infinitely outshone those of the false, so likewise have their words, discourses, and writings. Let any man, who is capable of doing it, compare the *Alcoran*, or any other system of false Religion, with our sacred Scriptures; and, if he has not lost his understanding, he must needs see, that ours are far more worthy of God, more agreeable to the Reason of man, and better suited to attain the happiness both of our Souls and Bodies, than all the rest. Let any man who has read

such

such Books as are writ against our Holy Religion, speak impartially, if he does not find the matter of them such, as may be justly called The dictates of an evil Spirit; if the arguments of them deserve to be named with the sound sense, gravity, and serious reasonings of what we call, *the word of God*. Let him look out to the Authors of them, and name one, if he can, who is not pleased with that blasphemy, lewdness, confusion, and every evil work against God and Man, which he sees prevailing among their followers and admirers.

THE Prophet *Elijah* wrought but two miracles in the Widow of *Sarepta*'s house, by which she declares her self fully convinced that he was the Servant of God, and spoke nothing but the truth in his name. But suppose he had wrought many more, so as to have made them common; had the feeding of her Family, and raising her Son from the dead, been less miraculous? suppose he had wrought them in other places, where she could not have known all the circumstances so, as to have clearly discern'd the Finger of God in them; had those which he did for her, been less divine? If she was satisfied that her Son was actually dead, and brought to life again by the Prayers of the Prophet, was not this enough to convince her, that God was with him, and to persuade her, that he always spake and acted agreeably to the mind of God, tho' she could not always comprehend his meaning?

I do not think there is any man living, who understands the holy Scriptures, or indeed any other ancient Writer, exactly well, in several things which depend upon the nature, customs, and genius of the Country where, and the Times when they were written. We see that learned men, who study these things,

are daily explaining them, and setting them in a new light. What then? Shall those who do not comprehend every thing, believe nothing? Or is there not rather ground enough for any reasonable and sober man to conclude, from what he knows and understands of the word of God, that those passages of it which are above his understanding, must be likewise true? There are some things which are such plain indications of a divine Power, that they serve as seals to give credit to others which are not so intelligible. The woman in my Text argued as justly as the best Logician in the world, when she concluded from *Elijah's* raising her Son from the dead, that he was indeed the man he pretended to be. For by this miracle the Almighty Creator, who hath the issues of Life and Death in his hands, in whom we all live and move and have our Being, gave the highest testimony, that the man, at whose instance he did it, was his servant.

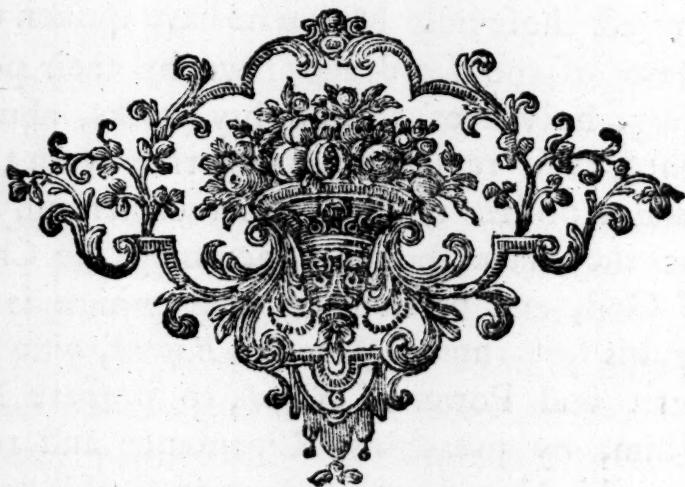
AND thus all People of good sense, whether male or female, learned or unlearned, have always reasoned upon like cases. When our blessed Lord had opened the eyes of the man who was born blind, with no other means than washing in common water, the Patient stoutly maintained it before the Rulers of the Jews, that his Healer must needs be a Prophet of God; ' for, says he, this is undeniably the work of God: But God would never work by this man, if ' he were his enemy, and acted contrary to his will in ' other things.' This is what brought *Nicodemus*, and many other considerable men, to acknowledge, tho' privately, that our Lord was the Person he pretended to be. *John iii. Rabbi*, says he, *we know that thou art a teacher sent from God: for no man can do those works*  
*which*

which thou doſt, except God were with him. And when he had raised *Lazarus* from the dead, it is no wonder that many of the *Jews* believed him to be the *Messiah*. The wonder is, how any of them who allowed the Fact, could with-hold their Faith, as we find they did; and sought to kill *Lazarus*, that he might not be a living monument of so divine a Miracle. But the Widow of *Sarepta* shall rise up in the last Judgment against such reprobates, and shall condemn them: For she acknowledged *Elijah*, upon the raising of her Son, to be a Prophet sent from God; whereas these wretches persecuted the Author of a Resurrection attended with more wonderful circumstances.

LET us all be warned by these things, to save our selves from this untoward and sinful Generation. Let us not reject those holy Men who have spoken to us in the Name of the Lord, and have by their powerful preaching, holy lives, and mighty works, abundantly established their reputation, that they were the Prophets and Apostles of God. Let us seriously regard all that they have spoken concerning the Christ the Son of God, and particularly that which is said of him by his fore-runner *John the Baptist*, who came in the Spirit and Power of *Elijah*, to prepare his way before him, by preaching Repentance and remission of Sins in his Name; and bare witness of him, saying, 'This is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world; the light which shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not; the only begotten Son, who came from the bosom of the Father, to declare his nature, will and worship to us. Let us thankfully embrace the writings of his Evangelists and Apostles, concerning his holy Life, heavenly Doctrine, wonderful Works, and Resurrection

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from the Dead, that so governing our selves by this faith, we may be raised out of the dust by his power, according to his gracious promises, and be invested with that Glory which was seen at his Transfiguration, in the company of *Moses* and *Elias*, and finally be exalted to that immortal Kingdom where all faithful Christians shall ever dwell with Christ their Lord and Head, and where he now reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God world without end.



SERMON



## SERMON LXVII.

*On the Ninth Sunday after TRINITY.*

M O R N I N G.

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I K I N G S xviii. 17, 18.

*And it came to pass when Abab saw Elijah, that he said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy Father's House, in that ye have forsaken the Commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.*

**S**UCH were the mutual Salutations that passed between the King of *Israel*, and one of his best Counsellors, at a juncture which required much to be done for the relief of the Kingdom; which had now groaned under a Drought, and a Famine consequent thereupon, for three Years and six Months. And no doubt but all the Inhabitants were sorely afflicted, and multitudes perished through want of the Fruits of the Earth: as for the Cattle, they had no Grass to feed upon, but such as grew by the sides of Fountains, Brooks, and Rivers, and was grown such

such a rare Commodity, that the King himself went in search of it.

AT the same time he made most diligent enquiry after the Prophet *Elijah*, not only in his own Dominions, but likewise in all the neighbouring Nations that were at peace and amity with him. And when they affirmed that he was not among them, he required them to declare upon Oath, that they knew nothing of him.

WHAT could be the reason, that *Ahab* was so concerned to find out a Man for whom he had such an Aversion, as appears in several passages of his History? He could have no favour to confer upon him. Did he intend to punish him? This does not appear to have been his Design, 'till after the matters recorded in this Chapter were over, when he told *Jezebel* how *Elijah* had slain all the Prophets of *Baal*; whereupon she swore by her Gods to send him out of the World as a Sacrifice to their Ghosts. But at the interview mentioned in my Text, *Ahab* seems not to have had any design upon the life of *Elijah*. The reason then of his strict enquiry after him, I take to be this: While *Ahab* was in the career of his Impieties, exceeding all the Kings of *Israel* that went before him, *Elijah* came boldly into his Presence, and having sharply reproved him for his grievous Violations of God's Laws, told him, that as a just Judgment upon him and his People, there should be a long drought in the Land, accompanied with a Famine, and that not so much as a shower of Rain, or the least Dew should fall, till *Ahab* and he should meet again; and that he might believe that this was the Word and Will of God, he confirmed what he had said with a solemn Oath, and immediately departed,

ed, and concealed himself, sojourning in remote and private Places for three Years and a half, as both our Saviour, *Luke* iv. and St. James, Chap. v. have taught us to compute the time, though it is not expressly denoted in the History before us.

NOW *Ahab*, 'tis likely, despised the Prophet's threatening for some time, as such wicked Tyrants are too apt to do; but when he found that it was executed, and had lain upon them for a good while, and that none of his Prophets of *Baal*, or of the Groves could procure Rain; though he hated *Elijah* in the general, yet he very much longed to meet him again, as well rememb'ring his last Words, and hoping that he would revoke the interdict and curse which he had laid on the Land.

THIS was the reason which moved *Ahab* to make such diligent search after *Elijah*; and when he had found him, he falls to expostulating with him in very fower and angry Language; *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* One might see by this blunt and sullen beginning, that the King was no friend to the Prophet, nor his Religion. Whereas *Obadiah*, the Steward of his House, had a little before discovered his own good Affections, by a respectful and courteous Salutation, *Art thou my Lord Elijah?* And yet this was no greater civility than what was commonly paid to the Prophets of God; for though they were often Men of but poor Circumstances, and mean Appearance, yet out of respect to their Sanctity, and in honour to God, whose immediate Messengers and Heralds they were, the greatest Princes gave them the style of *Lord* and *Father*, when they spoke to them. But *Ahab* was one of those who knew how to tell God's Minister that he despised his Religion, by treating his Person

with

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with an air of haughtiness and contempt. *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* Can such a pitiful, inconsiderable Fellow as you are, bring so much Mischief upon a whole Nation? 'No truly, replies the Prophet, with a just courage and assurance, 'This Evil is not from me, but from your self and your Father's House.' And how much they deserved this charge, will appear from a short view of their History.

*OMRI*, the Father of *Ahab*, of what Tribe is uncertain, was a Soldier in the Army of *Israel*, in their Wars under their King *Elah*. But when *Zimri*, Captain of *Elah*'s Chariots, had conspired against this King his Master, and slain him, intending to reign in his stead, the Army not approving of what he had done, made *Omri* their King in the Camp; and under his conduct they besieged *Zimri* in the City *Tirzah* so straitly, that he was burned in his Palace there, on the seventh Day of his Reign. However this did not quite clear *Omri*'s Way to the Throne of *Israel*. For a great body of the People not consenting to the military Election which had been made of him in the Camp, divided from the rest, and chose *Tibni*, a valiant Man, who seems to have succeeded *Zimri* in his command of the Chariots. Hereupon a Battel ensued between the two Parties, in which *Tibni* fell, as having the weaker Army, and then *Omri* reigned over all *Israel*, without a Rival.

HIS Reign, which lasted twelve Years, was memorable for two things. One was, that he built *Samaria*, and made it the royal City of the Kingdom of *Israel*. The other was, that in matters of Religion he was worse than any of his Predecessors; for he not only walked in the ways of *Jeroboam*, but made some

some addition to his Sin, by those Laws which the Prophet *Micah* calls *the Statutes of Omri*, *Mic. vi. 16.* whereby either some new Idolatry was introduced, or the old augmented and improved.

IN all which he shewed himself very unmindful of God's Mercies, who had raised him from a private Estate, and carried him through much Opposition, till he was settled upon the Throne of *Israel*. And it was a farther aggravation of his Impiety, that having seen how the Houses of *Jeroboam*, and of *Basha*, were cut off for their Idolatry, and heard the constant threatenings of God by his Prophets on that account, yet he would chuse to walk in the same odious and accursed ways.

BUT his Son and Successor *Ahab* exceeded him in his Provocations of God, as far as *Omri* had exceeded all his Predecessors. For as if it had been but a small matter to affront God with the Sin of *Jeroboam*, he went (expressly contrary to God's Law in that behalf) and took to Wife the Daughter of *Eth-baal*, or *Ithobalus*, as other Historians call him, King of the *Tyrians* and *Sidonians*, a Woman of incorrigible Pride and Insolence, who quickly filled *Israel* with her Witchcrafts and Idolatries, insomuch that she entertained eight hundred and fifty Priests, as her own Chaplains, *viz.* four hundred and fifty for the Temples of *Baal*, and four hundred for the service of the Groves and High Places.

AND now all *Israel* was so much over-run with strange Gods, that it lookt as if every Town thereof was a *Tyre* and *Sidon*. The *Phenician Baal* was the great name that was invocated, and his zealous votary the Queen had made room for him, by throwing down the Altars of the Lord God of *Israel*, and  
slaying

slaying his Prophets with the Sword. So there were some Martyrs and Confessors for true Religion, though the main body of the People complied, as they do in all Ages, with the Religion of their supream Governours.

AT this juncture it was that God raised up the Prophet *Elijah*, of whose Pedigree we have no farther account, but that he was a *Thessbite*, i. e. a native of *Thesbon* in *Gilead*; as *Josephus* affirms; but endued with such a wonderful measure of the Spirit of God, that next after *Moses*, he was esteemed the very chief of the Prophets.

THIS was a fit Man to tell *Abab*, as he bravely did, when he called him the Troubler of *Israel*, that he had misplaced his Charge, and that the Royal House were the real Troublers of *Israel*, in that they had forsaken the Commandments of the Lord, and served *Baalim*. ‘Now therefore, says he, if you would have this Drought and Famine removed, give orders to all your Prophets of *Baal*, and of the Groves, to meet me at Mount *Carmel*, and there we will put it to a fair Tryal, whether we ought to worship your *Sidonian* God *Baal*, or the Lord God of *Israel*.’

THE King, knowing that he and his People were reduced to the last necessity for want of Rain, so far complied with the Prophet’s Motion, that he summoned all the Prophets of *Baal* to meet at the time and place appointed; and thought fit to countenance them with his own Presence, and many of his Couriers. The occasion drew vast multitudes of People together, who partly out of Curiosity, and partly out of Concern for Religion, were desirous to see the Event.

NOW

NOW when they were assembled and thronged about Mount *Carmel*, *Elijah* stood up in the midst of them; and after he had lamented the unhappy State of Religion among them, and the grievous Calamities which they had drawn down upon their own Heads by worshipping of Idols, he told them he had called them together that day, to give them a demonstration who was the true God, which he proposed to do in this manner: ‘ Let us, says he, build two Altars, and lay a slain Bullock with Wood upon each Altar, but put no fire under either of them. Then let us fall to our Prayers, and beseech God to send Fire from Heaven to consume the sacrifice; and the God that answereth by fire, let him be esteemed and worshipped as the only true God, and the others accounted as abominations.’ To which the People answered, That it was a fair proposal, and they were very desirous to see it tried.

IT was indeed a most ancient and well-known token that God accepted a sacrifice, if the wood on the altar that was to consume it, took fire in a miraculous way, without any human application to kindle it. Thus God is supposed to have testified his acceptance of the sacrifices of *Abel*, *Noah* and *Abraham*. Thus he certainly approved the sacrifices of *Moses*, *Gideon*, *David*, and *Solomon*. We read *Lev. ix. 24.* at the Dedication of the Tabernacle, that when the Sacrifice was laid upon the Altar, and *Moses* and *Aaron* had offered up solemn Prayers to God, and blessed all the Congregation, *there came fire out from before the Lord, and consumed the burnt-offering and the fat*; which when all the People saw, they shouted for joy that God was present among them, and fell upon their

their faces, and worshipped him. This celestial fire was preserved by a continual supply of fuel night and day, for the service of the Altar; and was so strictly appropriated to that use, that *Nadab* and *Abihu*, Sons of *Aaron*, were struck dead for offering incense with common fire, as we read *Lev. x. 2ly*. When *Gideon* was entertaining an Angel of God, who came to encourage him to fight against the *Midianites*; the Angel directed him to lay the sodden kid, and cakes and broth which he had provided for him, upon the ground; which done, he touched it with his staff, and immediately there sprung up a fire which consumed it; whereby *Gideon* was fully persuaded that this apparition was a real messenger of God to him, *Judges vi. 20. 3ly*. When *David* offered an atonement in the threshing floor of *Ornan* the *Hebrite*, to appease God's wrath, which he had provoked by numbering *Israel*, it is said, 1 *Chr. xxi.* that the Lord answered him by fire, i. e. this heavenly fire we are speaking of, kindled the wood upon the Altar, and consumed his sacrifice. Lastly, When *Solomon*, at the Consecration of his Temple, had made an end of praying, 2 *Chr. vii.* fire came down from Heaven, and consumed the offerings and sacrifices which lay ready upon the Altar; and the glory of the Lord filled the House, so that the Priests could not enter into it. And when all the Children of *Israel* saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord upon the House, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground, and worshipped and praised the Lord.

THUS we have seen, that when fire either visibly fell from Heaven, or miraculously sprung up in the wood upon the Altar, and consumed the sacrifice, it was a known testimony of God's accepting

ing the worship and service that was then offered him. And though the ordinary way of sacrificing was, by fire preserved and continued from such as at first fell from Heaven, as I noted before; yet upon extraordinary occasions God vouchsafed to give this miraculous evidence of his presence, and approbation of what was done.

THIS method therefore which *Elijah* made choice of, to prove the truth of Religion by it, was what he knew to be agreeable to the Will of God, and the former dispensations of his Providence. And now having the unanimous consent of the People to proceed in it, he recommended it to *Baal's* Prophets to go before him in raising their Altar, and ordering their sacrifice according to the terms agreed upon. They did so, and fell to their invocations of *Baal*, which they continued 'till noon, but without obtaining any other answer than what *Elijah* made them, in his ironical description of their Deity. Then they ran about their Altar with ecstatick motions, and cried aloud, and cut their flesh with knives and lancets 'till the blood gush'd out upon them, hoping by this means to move their God to take pity of them, and answer them. But when there was no voice, nor any token of regard given them, and the time of Evening Sacrifice was now come, they were forced to desist without success, ashamed and weary of what they had done.

THE N *Elijah* stood up, and desired of the People a reverend attention, and that they would assist him to build an Altar with twelve stones, according to the number of the Tribes of the Sons of *Jacob*. The Altar being raised, he laid his wood and his bullock for sacrifice upon it, and made a trench a-

bout it, which he filled with many Barrels of Water, 'till his Sacrifice floated in it.

HAVING put things in such order as he would have them, he address himself to God in Prayer, invoking him by the name of the God of *Abraham, Isaac* and *Jacob*, beseeching him to declare himself to be the God of *Israel*, and to own his Prophet upon this occasion, and convert the hearts of his People who had erred and stray'd from his ways. Scarce had he finished this short supplication, when fire fell down from the Lord out of Heaven with such a force, that it consumed not only the flesh of the Bullock and the Wood, but the very stones and materials of the Altar, and dried up the Water that had been poured out there in great abundance. This amazing manifestation of the Divine Power struck all the People with such irresistible conviction, that they fell on their faces, and cryed out, *The God of Elijah is the true God.*

I will not here dissemble my knowledge of what occurs in some of the Pagan Writers to this purpose. Several *Greek* and *Latin* Authors make mention of Sacrifices among them, which have been consumed by a spontaneous fire, kindling without natural means or human application. Neither will I say, with some learned Men, that this was a cheat of the Pagan Priests, and a counterfeiting of a true Miracle to get credit to their Superstition. For we know that the Spirits whom the heathen Writers worshipped, did many strange things, sometimes without natural Means, and sometimes above them: But how far their Miracles came short of the Divine, we see in the contest between *Moses* and *Pharaoh's Magicians*. We may allow that the Dæmons have a power to

kindle

kindle fire on their own Altars, without weakening the argument here before us for proof of the superior power of God: For in this instance we find, that God can wholly restrain them, whenever he pleases, and all the distress and importunity of their Adorers shall get no help of them. Here was a Question between Men of several Religions, whose was the true God; and it was agreed that He who answered by fire, should be acknowledged as such: Now if any *Phenician Historian* could give me the best assurance, that their God *Bel* or *Baal*, had very often set fire to his own sacrifice, yet I should very justly affirm him to be a false God, because when he was brought in competition with the God of *Israel*, that God restrained him, and took this way to give proof of his own superior Power.

AND therefore with good reason, and like a faithful servant of God, *Elijah* struck in with the Peoples zeal, and while the impressions of the Miracle were strong upon their minds, incited them to fall on and destroy the Prophets of *Baal*. For his God, who had just now manifested his superior Power to their utter confusion, had of old enacted a positive Law, *Deut. xiii.* that *Idolaters and Seducers to a false Religion should be put to death without mercy.* And never was there an occasion which more vehemently called for the execution of this Law. For these Men had not only done the greatest injury and dishonour to God, by invading the lot of his own Inheritance, the land which he had chosen to preserve his name and worship in it; but they had likewise filled this Land with his judgments, by defiling it with their abominations and lying vanities; and that their Impiety might reign triumphant, they had

abrogated his Laws, thrown down his Altars, and slain his Prophets with the sword. Just and right therefore it was, that the violence which they had done to others, should be returned upon their own heads: And the justice of God was so far satisfied with this Execution, as immediately to send abundance of rain upon the thirsty Land.

AND thus the Prophet *Elijah* has fairly cleared himself from being the Author of *Israel's* Calamities, and proved them to be justly imputable to *Ahab* and his idolatrous family. *I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house, in that ye have forsaken the Commandments of the Lord, and addicted your selves and your People to the worship of strange Gods.*

FOR a native of *Israel*, descended from *Abraham*, as *Ahab* was, to persecute the Religion of his most pious Ancestors, and extirpate that faith and worship of the true God, which they had so carefully settled in their family, and recommended to all generations of their posterity; for a King who is God's Vice-gerent, to teach rebellion against his Maker, and violate the Divine Laws, while he exacts obedience to his own Commands; what could be more contrary to the design of his office, to the power wherewith he was invested, and the sublime honour and authority wherewith he was dignified? If the King of *Israel* will abuse these gifts to the service of *Baal*, the God of *Israel* will forsake him, and leave him to famish and be miserable with his helpless dumb Idols.

THE Profaneness, Blasphemy, and Idolatry of Governors, was always matter of sad consideration to the holy Prophets and servants of God, not only because his infinite Majesty was thereby publicly dishonour-

dishonoured, but because they saw national calamities gathering like a tempest over the Cities and Habitations of such Offenders. For they knew that none but God had power enough to punish them ; and they considered that since such Governors would severely animadvert upon any of their own Subjects, who should rebel against their Persons or Government ; how much more reasonable was it for their great Master in Heaven, who is infinitely jealous of his honour, to punish such of his ministers upon earth, as neglected to serve him in the stations wherein he had placed them, but abused the charge which he had given them, and perverted his Gifts to the gratifying of their own lusts, as if they had not received them at his hands.

SHALL the Persons of earthly Potentates be held so sacred, that none of their Subjects shall be suffered to live, who lift up their hand, or sharpen their tongue against them ? and shall the same Potentates blaspheme, and suffer to be blasphemed, that glorious Majesty by whom and for whom they reign, and conspire to break his Laws, and banish his fear and worship out of the World, who created it that he might be feared and obeyed and worshipped in it ?

CERTAINLY God who made the World, and constantly preserves it, has more right to be obeyed and glorified in it, than any the most honourable and worthy of the Sons of men, who are but his Creatures, and depend upon him both for their Being and Well-being.

LET us therefore beseech Almighty God to endue our Legislators and Governors with such a lively sense and reverend awe of his Divine Majesty, that

they may seek his Glory, and cause his Name to be Sanctified in the first place; that our Religion may be purified from Atheism, Heresie, and Profaneness; that we may serve him in true Holiness and Righteousness, and all the People may praise him. This is the only sure way to make both Rulers and Subjects happy in their earthly Governments, and to fit and prepare them for the Inheritance of God's Heavenly Kingdom, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord, who there liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost ever one God World without end.



SERMON



## SERMON LXVIII.

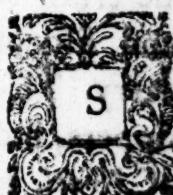
On the Ninth Sunday after TRINITY.

E V E N I N G.

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I K I N G S xix. 10.

*And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only am left; and they seek my life to take it away.*

 T. Paul, in the eleventh Chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, citing this passage, saith, that *Elias made intercession to God against Israel*, i. e. he remonstrated against *Israel's impiety and apostasy*, in the instances here mentioned. But for his own particular sufferings, they were occasioned by the instigation of Queen *Jezebel*, as appears from the beginning of this Chapter, where we learn, that when *Ahab* had given his wife an account of all that happened in the late great assembly at Mount *Carmel*, and how, when *Elijah's sacrifice* had been offered with all the tokens of

the Divine Acceptance, he had instigated the People to fall upon *Baal's* Prophets, and put them to death: *Jezebel* was so far from being moved by the Hand of God, which was manifested in this business, to embrace the Prophet's Religion, that she sent him a message to assure him, that his triumph should be very short, and that he had but one day longer to continue in life.

IT may seem strange, that when she had resolved upon the Prophet's death, she should give him such express notice of it: But this may be imputed to the excess of her rage, which would not suffer her to keep it to her self. And she thought perhaps, that she had him so sure, that he could not escape her; or rather that his own hardy Spirit would embolden him to stand out against her, as he had lately done against *Ahab* in the great dispute at *Carmel* before mentioned.

HOWEVER, the Prophet made that use of this warning, which a prudent man ought to make in such circumstances. He had lately done enough at *Carmel*, to show the power of his God and the truth of his Religion; and caused four hundred and fifty of *Baal's* Priests to be sacrificed for their Idolatry. This wonderful victory over *Baal* and his worshippers, had not stirred up the hearts of the Princes of *Israel*, as it should have done, to banish the usurping Spirits, and restore the Altars, Laws, and Service of the God of their Fathers: It was therefore fit that *Elijah* should leave them as incorrigible, and provide for his own safety. Accordingly he rose, and fled for his life; first, to *Beersheba*, which was the utmost border of *Judea*, where he left his servant, because he resolved to go farther into the wilderness, famous for

the

the travels of *Israel* out of *Egypt*, and to spend some time there, in a solitary and mortified life: And he would not bring the young man into the same hardships, which were not suitable to his age and condition.

INTO the Wilderness therefore he came; and after he had travelled a day's journey in it, he sat down in the evening under a Juniper-tree; and when he had made his Prayers to God, in which he requested to be taken out of this miserable life, as not able to do any farther service in it, he composed himself to sleep. He had not rested long, before an Angel awoke him, bidding him rise and take some refreshment: Whereupon he lifted up his head, and when he had looked about him, he saw a new-baked cake, and a cruse of water placed just behind him. These he took into his hands, and when he had eaten and drank enough of them to satisfy his present cravings, he laid him down to sleep again, being weary with age and travel, and not so surprized at this miraculous Table in the wilderness, as he must otherwise have been, had he not been formerly fed several times by miracle.

BUT the Angel who brought him this food, quickly came and raised him again, telling him he must eat the whole of it, for that it was given him on purpose to strengthen him for many days travel in the Wilderness. And it plainly appeared by the effect, that this was extraordinary food indeed, and afforded a more vigorous nourishment than any other that was ever heard of: For the Prophet went in the strength of it forty days and nights, till he came to *Horeb* the Mount of God. Not that *Horeb*, in a right line, was so many days journey from *Beersheba*. It was but

about

about an hundred miles distance, which might have been gone in a few days, even by an elderly man. And therefore *Elijah*, not being in haste, either went much about, or sometimes rested long in a place, to make it forty days to get thither. Unless we should bring into the number of these days, the time which he spent at *Horeb*, and in his return from thence; it being very agreeable to Reason that we should reckon thus, tho' not so consistent with the letter of the sacred Text.

*ELIJAH* being arrived at *Horeb*, took up his lodging in a Cave in the side of the Mountain, the memory of which is still preserved by a Chapel built there. It was called the Mount of God, as being held sacred even before the days of *Moses*, but particularly because he waited upon God, and heard him speak from Heaven, and received the Law from him in this Mountain. While he was at this place, several things of an extraordinary sort happened; as first, a violent wind, which was so prodigiously strong, that it rent the mountains, and threw down and brake in pieces the rocks; after that an earthquake; thirdly, a great deal of thunder and lightening, such as was at the delivery of the Law of *Moses*; and lastly, a still small voice, which came from the *Shechinah*, or Divine Majesty, and demanded of *Elijah*, *What he did in that place.*

SOME Commentators have interpreted these words as God's reproof to the Prophet for leaving *Jezreel* and *Samaria*, where he was still wanted to oppose their Idolatry, and retiring to the desert where there was no such business to be done.

THE lawfulness of flying in time of persecution, hath been considered by several wise men and learned writers

writers of old. The two most notable ones which I remember on this occasion, are *Tertullian* and *Athanasius*. The first, who lived in the second Century of Christianity, condemns it; the other, who flourished a hundred and thirty years after, defends it. Living in such different ages, they could not write one against the other; so that it was not a controversy between these two men, but they wrote upon other occasions. And the occasions being considered, and just allowances made for their different tempers and circumstances, a candid Reader will find good weight and reason in both discourses, with no great difference between them.

BUT because *Athanasius* is most for our purpose, I will show you his way of arguing, and justifying flight from persecutors, as agreeable to the will of God, and the practice of the best of men. ‘ Those ‘ says he, (meaning the *Arians*) who blame us for ‘ withdrawing and hiding our selves from our mortal ‘ enemies, what will they say to *Jacob*’s flying from ‘ the face of his brother *Esau*? and to *Moses* his flight ‘ into *Midian* for fear of *Pharaoh*? How will these ‘ Casuists, who hold it unlawful to fly in persecution, ‘ defend *David*’s leaving his house as he did, that he ‘ might escape the hands of *Saul*’s Cut-throats? or ‘ his hiding himself in the Cave of *Adullam*? or ‘ his feigning himself to be mad in the Court of *Achish* King of *Gath*, when they grew jealous of him ‘ there, as too considerable a man? How will these ‘ unthinking disputants defend the great *Elijah*, who ‘ tho’ he had such power with God, as even to raise ‘ the dead, yet fled twice in persecution; first from ‘ the wrath of *Ahab*, and afterwards from that of ‘ *Jezebel*?’

‘ To come to our Christian Dispensation ; Did not Christ’s Disciples hold their assemblies as privately as they could, and in upper rooms, for fear of the Jews ? as we read in the *Acts* of the Apostles. And St. Paul tells us, that when he was at *Damascus*, his Christian Brethren understanding that the Governor of the City laid wait at the gates for him, to apprehend him, they let him down in a basket over the City-wall, and so he made his escape. But if examples will not satisfy, we can abundantly strengthen them with the rules and precepts of the divine Law. *When they persecute you in one city, says our Saviour, fly to another. And when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, then let those that are in *Judea* flee to the mountains. Let not him that is on the house-top, come down to take any thing out of his house. Let not him that is in the field, return home to fetch any thing, not even his coat, or most necessary apparel.* And the great Legislator himself practised his own rules from his first coming into the World, till he had finished the work of his Ministry in it. Witness his flight into *Egypt* in the arms of his Mother, to avoid the fate of the murdred Innocents : His retiring into a desert place, when he heard of the beheading of *John the Baptist* : His frequent withdrawings from the Jews, when they went about to kill him. And when in their great council of Priests and Pharisees, they came to a resolution to cut him off, because he had raised *Lazarus* from the dead ; it is said, *John xi.* that Jesus walked no more openly among the Jews ; but went thence to a country near to the wilderness, into a city called *Ephraim*, and there he continued with his disciples.’

NOW from these authorities and examples it manifestly appears to be the will of God, that his servants should in some cases, save themselves by flight from the murdrous designs of their persecutors; because they may do him more service in life than death. Whenever this shall be the case, it will speak for itself, and be easily understood by all persons of a good discernment. When they see that the Glory of God demands their presence to abide by it, they set aside all considerations of safety, and offer their lives to serve their great Master. This did all the Prophets and Apostles, and *Jesus Christ* himself. And he gives his blessing to those who in such circumstances are persecuted even to death, and commends the good Shepherd, who bravely abides by his flock, and lays down his life for them. Such a one was the Prophet *Elijah* here before us; who put his life in his hands to serve *Israel*, and did and said all that he knew to be the will of God, without any fear of *Ahab* or *Jezebel*. And therefore we may safely conclude, and indeed the event shewed it, that when he fled from them, it was more for the service of God, that he should go than tarry.

AND this is the ground of his apology, which he makes for his flight in the words of my Text. For when the question was asked him, *what he did at Horeb*: ‘Oh, says he, my zeal for the Lord God of ‘Hosts hath brought me hither. I have done my ut-‘most to hinder the apostasy of the children of *Israel*; ‘but nothing can withstand it. They have forsaken ‘thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, slain thy pro-‘phets with the sword. And I being the only man ‘from whom they apprehend opposition, they seek to ‘make me a sacrifice to their new God *Baal*.’

IN

IN which words there are these particulars which deserve our farther consideration.

THE first thing which the Prophet alledges in excuse of his flight, is this, that he had testified a zeal for the *Lord of Hosts*, and that not an ordinary one. *I have, says he, been very zealous.* And it was well for him that he had been so. For if he had run to *Horeb*, without any other plea in his mouth than this, that he had kept his principles and his conscience to himself, without going over to a strange Religion; but being but one man, he had not appeared in publick, as not being able to bear up against such a torrent of Impiety: This plea would have suited but ill with the character of a Prophet, who by his office is a publick Minister of Religion, and thereby bound to vindicate the purity, and promote the practice of it among the people where he resides. Let us hear what God required of his Prophets in general, and then we shall see that Zeal was an indispensable part of their office. *Cry aloud, says he to *Isaiah*, lviii. and spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of *Jacob* their sin.* And to *Jeremiah* he says, *Thou shalt go to all, to whom I send thee; and whatsoever I command thee, that shalt thou speak.* But yet more expressly he enjoins *Ezekiel* to speak freely, tho' briars and thorns were in his way, and he dwelt among scorpions, to tell them the whole truth, let the consequence be what it would. *Thou art, says he, my watchman to the house of *Israel*: therefore thou shalt bear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.* And if thou forbear to warn a wicked man, he shall die in his sins, but his blood will I require at thy hand.

BY these passages it appears, that a Prophet was nothing, without such a degree of zeal, as would animate him to vindicate God's true Religion in the worst of times, when it was dangerous to appear for it, and when he had no reason to hope that he should be able to advance it, by all that he could do or say for it. Yet the divine Injunction was this, *Speak all my words, and suppress none of them, whether the people will hear, or whether they will forbear.*

SUCH a zeal is very necessary to make due impressions upon the minds of people, and convince them of the importance of Religion; which is apt to sink into neglect and contempt, when the Guardians of it are like men asleep, who cannot hear the voice of profaneness and blasphemy, tho' it be very loud, nor see the overflowings of impiety, when they rise so high, as to beat over the fences of God's heritage. Certainly a brave zealous man may do much service in such circumstances. We know that Religion, under God, has owed its preservation even to one such man. But if he should not be able to do much in his own time, yet his zealous endeavours may prove of great service to the piety of future generations. I doubt not but of the many millions, who have sate under the preaching of God's word, and heard of *Elijah's* zeal against the Prophets of *Baal*, great numbers have been much benefited by the account of it; the weak have been strengthened, the wavering have been settled, their esteem of God's Glory has been much raised, their notions of his infinite Wisdom, Presence, and Power, have been enlarged, by what they have seen and heard of him in the History of the Prophet *Elijah*.

AND therefore it was well for *Elijah*, as I noted before, that he could plead his zeal for the Lord of Hosts: For hereby he has escaped the condemnation of those negligent Prophets and Ministers, who by their luke-warmness have betrayed their Master's honour, and the life of his Flock; and he hath obtained that eminent degree of Glory, which is the crown of those who turn many to righteousness.

2. HE proceeds to complain of the Children of *Israel*, that notwithstanding the zeal and concern which he had express for their common Lord, and the miraculous favours which he had vouchsafed him, especially in his sacrifice at *Carmel*; yet after all, *these incorrigible people had forsaken his law*, which they had covenanted to observe, and by throwing down his Altars and killing his Ministers, had done their utmost to root out and banish his worship from among them.

IT is observable, that the Prophet charges this apostasy upon the Children of *Israel*; he says nothing of *Abab* and *Jezebel*, tho' they were at the head of it, and the first and principal movers in it: Not that he forbears to mention them out of respect to their persons: He was discharged from that ceremony by the nature, duty, and commission of his Office, as described before. And we see afterwards, chap. xxi. how boldly he pronounced a dreadful Sentence of impending Judgments to the very face of *Abab*, upon him and all his household, when God sent him to do it.

IT may be said, that this is only a shorter way of speaking, and that by *the children of Israel*, *Elijah* comprehends Head and Members all under one. And this, I own, is a fair way of interpreting.

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BUT then I think we may justly conclude from hence, that in this revolt from God to *Baal*, the members were as guilty as the head: And that the Prophet intends to prevent them from taking shelter in this excuse, that living under idolatrous Governors, they could not help this change in Religion. But they might have helped it very much. If *Israel* had stood firm to their covenant with their God, *Baal* would hardly have got a visible Church in all their Tribes, even tho' he had *Ahab* and *Jezebel* for his Founders. And perhaps even they would have judged it their best policy to have forborn honouring him with a publick Altar. Ill-disposed Governors are made much worse by flattering Subjects, who strive who shall be foremost in complying with their sins; and so they mutually push one another into the grossest enormities. How brave a people were the old *Romans* under their consular state? How free and open in their speeches? How hard to be seduced from the good old ways of justice and plain-dealing? But when they had changed their Consuls for Emperors, their spirits were quickly changed too, and they grew such dissemblers, hypocrites, so entirely obsequious to the supreme Nod, that their own Sovereigns have observed it with wonder and indignation, and have gone out of their Senate lifting up their eyes, and saying in a low voice, *Wretches, ripe for the yoke of bondage!* Just such people were the *Israelites* under the government of *Ahab*.

BUT some people think they may do every thing commanded them by lawful authority; and that the Commanders, not the Doers, are to answer for the sins and ill consequences of it. But this is a great mistake: For God has a right to man's obedience be-

fore all created Powers. And when we know his will, (as we easily may in matters of piety and virtue) we are bound to prefer it to any contrary order, according to that undeniable rule, that *it is fit to obey God rather than man*. The *Israelites* could not be ignorant of this rule, it is so easily collected from the whole tenor of their own law, and we have it in terms from men of their own Nation. And therefore when *Abab* destroyed their old Religion, and gave them a new one instead of it, they should utterly have refused their obedience, and have given this rule for their reason. Which they failing to do, *Elijah* justly charges it upon these children of *Israel*, *that they had forsaken God's covenant, thrown down his altars, and slain his prophets with the sword*: For this could never have been done in *Israel*, but by the hands of *Israelites*, who ought not to have done it.

3. WHEN the Prophet complains that his people had thrown down *the altars of God*, Interpreters are at a loss to know where to find these altars; for according to the Law, there was but one altar and place of sacrificing, and that was at *Jerusalem*; and this no doubt is the reason why the *Chaldee Paraphraſt* has rendered this word in the singular number. But the original *Hebrew* is plural, and other Interpreters adhere to it. And indeed *Israel* at this time, and for many years before, had no concern or power at *Jerusalem*. They were a distinct Kingdom of themselves; and *Jeroboam*, under whom their Kingdom begun, had put a stop to their going up to *Jerusalem* to worship. So that when *Elijah* complains that the Children of *Israel* had thrown down God's Altars, and slain his Prophets, we must not imagine that the Altar at *Jerusalem*, and the Prophets of *Judah*, were destroyed

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by them: No, they were in a flourishing condition at that time, under *Jeboishaphat*, a very good King. The Altars then which *Israel* threw down, were such as they found in their own Country; such as had been built by the Patriarchs and holy Men, before the foundation of the temple at *Jerusalem*. Of these we read, that there was one at *Ramah*, another at *Mispeh*, a third at *Gilgal*, a fourth at *Bethlehem*, a fifth at *Carmel*; and there might be more in other places. On these the pious people of the ten Tribes offered their sacrifices, when they were not permitted to go up to *Jerusalem* to worship. *Jeroboam* had forbid them to go thither, and now *Ahab* deprived them of these last reserved comforts,

BUT what occasion could there be for Altars, if there were no Sacrificers? *Elijah* complains, in the fourth place, that the Prophets of God were so rooted out of *Israel*, that he only was left, and was forced to fly his Country for the saving of his life.

WE must not interpret the word *only* in such a restrained sense, as if none but *Elijah* had survived the persecution, which was raised against the worshippers of the God of *Israel*. For presently after my Text God assures him, that he had reserved to himself seven thousand *Israelites*, who stood firm in their Religion, and had not bowed their knees to *Baal*. And besides, *Obadiah* had told him, chap. xviii. how he concealed an hundred of the Lord's Prophets from *Jezebel's* Executioners, and took care they were provided of sustenance in their concealment. Whence we conclude that *Elijah* could not be ignorant, that there were some Prophets besides himself, and other Servants of God now living in *Israel*.

WHEN therefore our Prophet says, *that he only was left*, he means that he was the only acting man, in this controversy between God and *Baal*, who shewed himself openly as God's Champion, against a whole army of Idolaters, with a King and Queen at the head of them. This is agreeable to what he said before, chap. xviii. when he proposed the trial of Religion by sacrifice: *I, even I only, says he to the people, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.*

SO that whatever *Obadiah's* Prophets, or the seven thousand men were, they either wanted age, or abilities, or courage, to come forth and plead for their Law, and their God, against a Religion which had all the power of the sovereign Authority to support it. They all kept out of the dangerous conflict: And tho' they would not renounce their God, yet they had not zeal and courage enough to own him publickly at this time. Not one of them joined *Elijah*, but left him to stand or fall by himself. So that he had truth and reason of his side, when he said he was the only Prophet of the Lord who appeared in his cause at this juncture.

TO us certainly *Elijah* was the only Prophet and Advocate of the cause of God at that time. To his zealous and active Spirit we are indebted for the glorious opposition which was made to idolatry at Mount *Carmel*. And of him we may learn what to think of the indolent professors of Religion; such, I mean, as can hear it reviled by blasphemous tongues, without shewing any concern about it. Shall I say this great Prophet accounts of them as no better than shadows and cyphers? I think he insinuates something worse of them. For when he says, that all *Israel*, except himself,

self, had forsaken God's Covenant, he certainly intends to upbraid those hundreds and thousands who preferred their own security before the Glory of God; and though they did not renounce him, yet neither would they make any open confession of him in dangerous times. They practised according to the saying of the Emperor *Tiberius*; *they left God to reckon with his enemies, and to do himself justice upon them.*

BUT this will not serve to excuse our easiness at the outrages of Atheists. For our heavenly as well as earthly Sovereign will judge us as Traitors and Enemies to his Government, if when it is struck at and undermined, we can be easy, and maintain a friendly communication with the aggressors. We justly celebrate *John the Baptist*, who came in the Spirit and Power of *Elias*, for that he constantly spoke the truth, boldly rebuked vice, and patiently suffered death for that truth which he had taught. And *from the days of John the Baptist*, says our Lord, *the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force*: By which, I suppose, he means, that no man who has not a true zeal for the honour and glory of God, shall ever be admitted into his heavenly Kingdom.

HOWEVER, if this be not plain enough, yet sure we cannot mistake those words of Christ, *Mark viii. 38. Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.* Let but these words be received into our hearts with that faith and reverence which we own is due to them, and they will much conduce to stir up in us, that zeal for God which I have been recommending. At least they will make us careful to avoid the company of

those wicked men, who are not afraid to sport with God and sacred Things. And by such avoidance we shall have a share in that blessing with which holy David begins his Book of *Psalms*, saying, *Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scornful*; he shall obtain blessing from the Lord, and honour from the God of his salvation, thro' his merits who came not to lessen, but exalt our zeal for the glory of God, *Jesus Christ our Lord*, to whom, &c.





## SERMON LXIX.

On the Tenth Sunday after TRINITY.

MORNING.

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I KINGS xxi. 28, 29.

*And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying: Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the Evil in his days; but in his Son's days will I bring the Evil upon his House.*

**H**OR the right understanding of these words, we must take a view of the matter of Fact which occasioned them; which was this. *Ahab King of Israel* had a mind to a Vineyard of one of his Subjects, *Naboth the Jezreelite*, because it lay hard by his Palace, and would serve him very conveniently for a Garden. In order to procure it, he speaks to *Naboth* about it, offering him either a better in exchange for it, or the full value of it in ready money. *Naboth* gives him a peremptory, and in appearance too blunt a denial. But indeed it was founded upon the Law,

which prohibited the alienation of a patrimony from one Tribe or Family to another; except in case of great Poverty, when a man might sell, but not outright, for it was to return to him again at the *Jubilee*. See *Levit. xxv.* Now *Naboth*, as he was not necessitous, so he considered, that if he should part with his Estate to gratify the King, it would be made part of the Royal Seat, and he should never recover it again.

*AHAB* could not be denied a thing, that he had so much set his Heart upon, without resenting it very grievously, and losing his Rest and his Appetite with the vexation of it. His Wife *Jezabel* understanding the cause of his disorder, first upbraids him with too much condescension. ‘ Is this like a King, to stand chaffering with your Subjects, whom you should rather command absolutely, and make your Will your Law? How should the great Affairs of the Kingdom go according to your mind, if you are baffled in so small a matter as this?’ Then she bids him set his Heart at rest, assuring him that she would speedily put him in possession of the Vineyard which had been denied him. And how will she accomplish this? Why, she writes Letters and seals them with the Royal Signet, to give them full Authority, and then dispatches them away to the Magistrates and Governors of *Jezreel*, the City where *Naboth* dwelt, commanding them in the first place to proclaim a Fast, thereby to alarm the Peoples minds with some horrid Plot or Conspiracy: and then on the Fast-day, when they were assembled together, to set *Naboth* in the midst of them, and procure two witnesses, suborned and instructed beforehand, to swear Blasphemy and Treason against him. Either

of which was a Capital Crime; but she put them together, to make sure work: That for his Blasphemy against God the People might rise up with the greater indignation, and stone him; and for his Treason against the King his Estate might be forfeited to him, against whose Crown and Dignity he had offended.

ALL this was speedily executed, as Jezabel had contrived. Her commands met with a ready Obedience from a profligate set of Officers. And in a few days she congratulated *Ahab* upon the News from Jezreel, that *Naboth* had been stoned to death there for Blasphemy and Treason, and that he had now nothing else to do, but go and take possession of the Vineyard, which was become his own by right of Confiscation.

HOW far *Ahab* was privy to this villainous contrivance of his Wife, it doth not fully appear; some think he was wholly ignorant of it. But the contrary seems to be sufficiently intimated by what follows. For the Prophet *Elijah*, by a special Commission from God, gives him the meeting within the walls of his newly-acquired Vineyard, and accosts him with these words; *Haſt thou killed, and also taken poſſeſſion? In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, ſhall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. Bebold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy Poſte-ri-ty, and will cut off from Ahab him that piffeth againſt the wall, and him that is ſhut up and left in Israel. And I will make thy Houſe like the Houſe of Jeroboam the Son of Nebat, and like the Houſe of Baapha the Son of Abijah, for the provocation wherewith thou haſt pro-vo-ke-d me to Anger, and made Israel to ſin. And of Je-ze-bel also ſpake the Lord, ſaying, The dogs ſhall eat Je-*

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*zabel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dies of Ahab in the City, the dogs shall eat, and him that dies in the field shall the fowls of the Air eat.*

HOW could *Ahab* bear all this in the presence of his great Officers, from an old man in a hair-cloth and a leathern girdle, who had lately incur'd his displeasure by the Slaughter of *Baal*'s Priests, and was fled for it, and now the first time he appears in his presence, devotes every limb of his Family to the Brutes? *Ahab* stormed at first, and began to pour out fierce Language; *Hast thou found me, O mine Enemy!* But when the Prophet was not in the least abashed with his looks or words, but leisurely and gravely pronounced the dreadful Sentence of God upon him; then his Spirits funk, he was struck dumb, he tore off his Royal Garments, put on hair-cloth in their stead, made his bed of the same, forbid any Table to be spread for him as usual, and eat only of the coarsest Food, and that very sparingly, till he was reduced to a Skeleton, and grown so feeble, that he could scarce set one foot before another, and had no manner of Heart to go about any Business. *Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying: Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the Evil in his days; but in his Son's days will I bring the Evil upon his House.*

IN discoursing upon which Words I shall consider,

I. THE heinousness of *Ahab*'s Sin.

II. HIS Humiliation for it.

III. THE effects of his Humiliation: It prevail'd with God in some measure to mitigate his punishment, by deferring it for some time.

IV. THE Uses which we should make of all this. AND first of all, *Ahab's Sin* (for his we may warrantably call it, since the Prophet has charged it so peremptorily upon him) was attended with several monstrous aggravations.

1st, IN the extent of it. We do not presently see to the bottom of this Blood. But look to 2 Kings ix. 26. and there we are taught that *Naboth's Sons* were put to death together with himself. Now I confess indeed, that by the Laws of God and man, and by a necessary consequence, children are often, in some degree, involved in the punishment of their Parents. But in capital cases, the Divine Law has excepted and separated them; *Deut. xxiv. 16. The Fathers shall not be put to death for the Children, nor the Children for the Fathers: Every Man shall be put to death for his own Sin.* Why then is *Ahab's Posterity* consigned to destruction on account of this Massacre? why, by the Sentence of God, who has reserved to himself this Power to visit Parents sins, and for this plain reason, That his Punishment might be commensurate to his Sin; and his Destruction proportionable to what he had inflicted, root and branch.

2dly, THE manner of compassing *Naboth's destruction* was detestable. It was by the corruption of a whole Court of Judicature, and by Subornation of Witnesses. And so all the Magistrates of *Jezebel*, at the instigation of *Ahab's Wife*, and to serve his wicked purposes, were drawn into the horrible guilt of wilful Perjury and deliberate Murder.

3dly, IT was a Sin of pernicious Example, and subversive of all Law and Justice. For what Judge would keep his hands clean from Gifts? what Witnesses would be afraid of Perjury? what Party would

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stick at prosecuting his Cause of Interest, Honour, Revenge, or the like, by the most violent and perverse, if probable means, when all *Israel* should hear that their King both practised and rewarded such proceedings in their Courts? And therefore with great Truth the Prophet upbraids him, that not content with his own personal provocations of God, he made *Israel* to Sin; he hired them to it by his Bribes, he constrained them by his Commands, he justified them by his Example. You see what a ground *Elijah* had for such a charge.

*4thly*, IT was one dismal Circumstance in this Tragedy, that it was acted under the Masque of Religion, and with high pretences to vindicate the Honour of God. It was introduced with a Fast to implore the Divine assistance and direction in the great cause they were entring upon, and the first Article in *Naboth's Accusation* was, That he had Blasphemed the great Majesty of Heaven. What a mystery of iniquity is the Heart of man, where such black Villainies are hatched, and wrapt up, and transacted under the specious colours of Zeal and Devotion! Odious Hypocrisie in the basest of human race, but much more in a King, who punishes with death the counterfeiting his Seal, and abusing his Image and Superscription to any fraudulent purpose, as being highly dishonourable to him; and yet is not ashamed to counterfeit the great Seal of Heaven, and profane the most sacred things of God, to give Authority to his Infernal Machinations.

SUCH was *Ahab's* Sin, so circumstantiated, and rendered exceeding sinful. Let us see, in the next place, how he humbled himself for it.

HIS Humiliation was extremely rigorous: The outward expressions of it could not be exceeded: and

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It certainly proceeded from a mighty Tempest of Confusion, Grief, and Horror in his Breast. But what was it that raised this Tempest? what part of the Prophet's discourse had proved such a Thunderbolt to him, as thus to astonish him? It was the Guilt of *Naboth*'s innocent blood charged home upon him, which thus overwhelmed and sunk his Spirits; a guilt which will fill the most elevated and daring Mind with Furies and Distraction. But was he humbled in a sense of the Contempt he had thrown upon God, the Injury he had done to man, and the havock he had made of all Laws and Justice, Sacred and Civil, by shedding blood in so vile a manner? I dare not affirm that: For if it had been so; if he had been touched with tender Sentiments of the wounds he had given to Religion and Righteousness, we had heard other things of him: Some Penitential Psalm or Prayer, deplored his Crime, and crying mightily to God for Pardon and Reconciliation: Some Edict or Proclamation issued out to suppress the Idolatries, and rectify the Corruptions which had grown to a prodigious size under his Reign. He who had thrown down God's Altars, and slain his Prophets with the Sword, would now have employed all hands to repair those Altars, and have published his Royal Protection and Favour to the Brethren and Sons of those Prophets. But not a word of all this: No such Reformation ever entred into the thoughts of *Ahab*. And therefore his Fasting and Mourning was not the fruit of any sincere Repentance, or abhorrence of Sin, but the result of some other Consideration.

WHAT that other Consideration was, is plain from these words of the Prophet: 'Thine, and thy 'Wife *Jezebel*'s Blood shall be poured out to the  
dogs

‘ dogs in this very Vineyard which thou hast defiled with the Blood of its righteous Owner; and the flesh of thy Posterity shall be thrown about as Carrion upon the face of the Earth: And thy name shall be blotted out, like thy wicked Predecessors, *Jeroboam* and *Baasha*, whom I have utterly extirpated.’ This, this is that which cut *Abab* to the Heart; to have such a ghastly picture of his own and his Children’s inevitable ruin presented to his Eyes. Had he heard nothing but a Declamation against his Sins, he could have born it as he had done before, without renting his Garments, or putting on Sack-cloth, or abstaining from the dainties of his Royal Table. But when it was told him, of what direful consequence his Sin would shortly prove to himself and his whole Family, he is struck dead with the painful apprehensions of it. This is the true account and reason of *Abab*’s Humiliation.

I proceed in the *III<sup>d</sup>* place to consider the effect of his Humiliation; and how it prevailed with God in some measure to mitigate his punishment.

*A H A B*’s sorrow, as is before declared, was not of the right sort. It was only for his Sufferings, not for his Sin; or for the Consequences of his Sin, not for the Matter of it. But however, by this defective and partial Humiliation he thus far gave Glory to God, that he owned he believed his Word, and consequently acknowledged his Power, that he was higher than the highest upon Earth; his Omnipotence, that he had seen through all the dark Plot which they had been carrying on; his Justice, that he would not suffer so much violence to pass unpunished; and his Vengeance, that he would retaliate the horrid Murder in all its circumstances, body for body, house for house, root for root, and branch for branch. ALL

ALL these Attributes of God *Abab* acknowledged and glorified, by his Humiliation. Which neither *Je-roboam* nor *Baasha* had done before him. For they hardened their Faces against the Prophets when they passed the same doom upon them, and took no farther notice of it.

AND therefore God looked upon *Abab*'s Sack-cloth and macerated Body with a compassion, which moved him to revoke something of the Punishment which he had intended for him. *I will not bring the Evil in his days, but in his Son's days will I bring it upon his House.* And how this was fulfilled, the following History teaches us. *Abab*, I suppose, according to the first Sentence, should have been a Spectator of the Calamities of his own Family; which, by virtue of this mitigation, were deferred 'till after his death; and whereas he should have expiated Innocent blood with the shedding of his own in *Naboth*'s Vine-yard, he had the favour to die honourably in the Field of Battle, fighting against the *Syrians*. In other circumstances the Prophet's first denunciation was executed to a tittle. *Abab* being slain at *Ramoth-Gilead*, his Body was brought home in his Chariot; *which when one washed in the Pool of Samaria, the dogs were observed, contrary to custom, to lick up the Blood.* His Son *Je-horam* and his Wife *Jezabel* were slain in the Vineyard at *Je-zreel*: And how the rest of his Family were cut off, we may read at large 2 Kings x.

AND here I cannot enter upon the Uses we ought to make of the foregoing passages better, than with admiring both the Goodness and Severity of God, manifested in the History now before us.

AND first I observe God's Goodness and tender regard of our sorrow for Sin, even where it is but selfish

selfish, and terminates in a sense of our own Sufferings. A Goodness so unmeasurable, that some have imagined God would rather suffer some diminution in his Attributes of Veracity, Justice, and Holiness, than not give full scope and latitude to his Mercy. But indeed all his Attributes are very consistent. For all his threatenings are conditional, and he may, with safety to his unchangeable perfections, forbear the execution of them, when the condition is fulfilled; and that according to his own rule, *Ezek. xviii. When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his Soul alive.* This is the Key to interpret all God's Threatnings, how positive and absolute soever the Terms may seem, in which they are conceiv'd. The same Veracity which has decreed the destruction of the Impenitent, has provided and made room for the escape and salvation of the returning Sinner. But multitudes, like *Ahab*, fast and mourn without true Repentance; and they, like him, have their reward for it: a suspension perhaps of Judgment, or an abatement in one circumstance or other; but the substance of the punishment is inflicted.

2dly, BEHOLD the Severity of God, how that he is no respecter of Persons, but dispenses Justice equally to all Men with an impartial hand. The Prince and the Peasant are both created in his Image: To both he hath said, *Whosoever sheddeth Man's Blood, by Man shall his Blood be shed.* If the greater prey upon the less, God stands up as an avenger of all those that are oppressed with wrong; he maketh inquisition for Blood, and forgets not the cry of the Poor. Though hand join in hand, in Guards, and Forces, and Alliances, they shall not protect their mighty Tyrant

rant from the Iron Hands of Divine Vengeance, which can with as much ease tear him in pieces, and give his flesh to the Fowls of the Air, and the Beasts of the Field, as he can do this to the meanest of his Vassals. Of this we have a standing Monument in the History before us.

THE rich and powerful are apt to despise the poor and helpless, to trample upon them as unworthy of a place or a name upon Earth; to tyrannize over them according to their superiority in Wealth, Strength, and Quality; to turn the very Laws against them by their Influence and Authority. But God has a right above all Courts, a prerogative above all Princes. When his Vicegerents fail in their Duty, and become perverters of Justice and Judgment, then he takes the Balance into his own Hand, and weighs out every Man's Portion with a rigid exactness, according to his Demerits. Then he makes fearful Examples of those who have put the Foundations of the Earth out of course, by their Barbarities and Outrages, and proclaims aloud that of the Prophet, *Jer. ix. 23. Thus saith the Lord: Let not the wise Man glory in his Wisdom, neither let the mighty Man glory in his might, let not the rich Man glory in his Riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the Earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.*

CERTAINLY this is the security of the greatest part of the World, that God is the Guardian and Protector of those that are by their Age, Sex, and Condition, most obnoxious to injuries and oppressions. *The Lord is King, the Earth may be glad thereof.* If he did not sometimes exert his regal Authority, and make

himself regarded and feared by the execution of his Judgments, what a Wilderness, or rather what an *Acelandama* would the World quickly become? How would the *Nimrods*, the *Ababs* encrease, and take away the Vineyards and the Lives of the meaner People, as freely as if they were the common Game of the Woods; and either allow them no Courts of Justice for redress, or else so model and frame those Courts, that they should constantly defend the outrages of their Lords and Patrons! But there is a hand from above, which restrains the Spirits of Princes, and does wonders among the Kings of the Earth; which conducteth the meek and desolate, and guards them in all their Distress.

THUS the Psalmist most justly observes of *Abraham*, and the rest of the Patriarchs, that when in their Pilgrimages from one Nation and Kingdom to another, they had not sufficient power of their own to defend themselves against the insults of Idolaters and Barbarians, God appeared for them, and reproved even Kings for their sakes, as he did *Abimelech* and *Pharaoh*, saying, *Touch not mine anointed, and do my Prophets no harm.* And convinced them, upon occasion, by dreadful effects of his Power, that he was able to save to the utmost all those that put their trust in him. Well therefore might his Saints, whose Blood he had avenged, *Rev. xix.* break forth into Songs of Triumph, saying; *Alleluja; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*

3dly, LET us be instructed from hence, not to grow hardy or audacious in any gross Sin, because we have often repeated it, or seen others repeat it with impunity. Remember the sayings of the Ancients, *Punishment is slow, but sure; and divine Vengeance hab*  
*leaden*

leaden Heels but iron Hands. I never doubted but that many a vile Offender goes out of the World without receiving the just reward of his Crimes. But so long as he has any surviving Posterity, he can never be said to be out of the reach even of temporal Punishments. For God has reserved to himself the liberty of visiting the iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children, to the third and fourth Generation. And what is done to the Child, is in effect done to the Parent. So that if deceased Parents could rise out of their Graves, they would commonly thrust themselves between their Children's Bodies, and the Swords of the Executioners. And the Prophecy that *Abab's* Blood should be shed in *Naboth's* Vineyard, is naturally, and without any straining, verified in the History which tells us, that his Son *Jehoram* was slain there. For *Jehoram's* Blood was very properly the Blood of *Abab*. Children being as much Parts of their Parents, as the Branches of any Tree are parts of the Tree.

THIS should be a powerful Argument to Parents, to refrain from the commission of those Sins which may entail a Curse on all their Posterity. You may be very gallant and fearless your selves, but however pity the Child that is yet unborn, the tender Suckling, the little Innocent that knows not the difference between Good and Evil. Could you endure to deliver them with your own hands to a Thief, a Murderer, an Executioner, to have their goods spoiled, their limbs mangled, and their blood poured out? 'Tis unnatural to imagine it: But then do not commit those Sins your selves, and treasure up the guilt for them, or allow and indulge them in such Crimes, as lead to such a fate. If you oppress others, you are raising up an Oppressor for your Son. If you supplant

others in their Estate or Livelyhood, you are sapping the foundation of your own House. If you touch the life of another by direct violence, or by a false Testimony, you are arming the hand of Divine Vengeance with an Ax, a Sword, or a Halter for your own Child. Possibly you may never live to see it, but look here and see what *Ahab's* House suffered after his death, and do not mingle so bitter a Cup for any of your Post-  
rity.

LASTLY, if you have committed any crying Sin, here is your Remedy pointed out to you, *Repent*. Not as *Ahab* did, only in Fasting and wearing Sack-cloth, and going softly; yet let not such parts of Humiliation be neglected neither. I can never agree with our Pretenders to Purity in their humour they have taken up, to explode this very word *Penance*, as it denotes outward Severities, and even pretend Religion for their doing so. *Seest thou*, says God to the Prophet, *how Ahab humbleth himself?* He was but a plausible Spectacle to men; his Heart was not right with God. And yet this meer garb of a Penitent had its weight with God, and found a way to his tender Compassion. Let not men presume to despise that which God approveth. He is so great a friend to Humility, that he loves the very shadow and picture of it, even where it is deficient in the Substance.

LET then our Humiliation for any grievous Sin, have its perfect work, not only in changing our Dress, our Diet, and our Aspect, but in renewing our inward parts, our Hearts and Affections: In begetting in us a detestation of our Sin, an abhorrence of our selves for having committed it, and a firm resolution of walking for the future in the ways of Piety and Virtue. Let us beg of God not only to deliver us from the punishment

nishment of our Sin, but also from the Temptations to it, that it may never more get the victory over us. For which purpose we must watch and pray, that we enter not into dangerous Conflicts above our strength. *Ahab* was too silent a Penitent. Let us not imitate him herein; but make the cry of our Supplications drown that of our Sins. Let the assiduity of our Confessions, and the vehemency of our Suit for Pardon, leave no room in the Court of Heaven for any Accuser to be heard against us. Could we be indefatigable in the ways of destruction, and shall we not be so in the pursuit of Salvation? Here Violence is sanctified, and the Kingdom of Heaven is the prize of it. Thus wrestling, we shall prevail; thus running, we shall obtain not only a removal, but a reverse of Judgment, if not wholly for the present Life, yet at least for that which is to come. Which deliverance may God grant us all for Jesus Christ's Sake, &c.





# SERMON LXX.

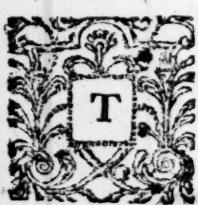
*On the Tenth Sunday after TRINITY.*

E V E N I N G.

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I K I N G S xxii. 35.

*And the battel increased that day ; and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even.*



HE King who died was *Abab*, that great enemy of the God of *Israel*, and friend of the *Sidonian Baal*, by whose Prophets he was seduced to undertake this war: Whereas the oracles of truth forewarned him of his fate which he met here. But he slighted the Divine Warnings, and so perished thro' his contempt of God's Word.

THE *Syrians*, whose chief City was *Damascus*, bordered upon *Israel*, and had frequent wars with them. Under King *David*, *Israel* prevailed, and *Damascus* was tributary. But under *Abab* their Success was so changed with their Religion, that *Benhadad*, then King of *Syria*, treated the King of *Israel* as his vassal. He forced him to do homage for all that he enjoyed,

enjoyed, even to his very wives and children: And might easily have maintained his superiority, could he have used it with any discretion: But he must needs raise an army, without any just provocation, and lead them against *Samaria*; which brought the *Israelites* to a necessity of arming, and fighting the *Syrians*: Over whom they obtained two victories, and in the second battel they routed them so entirely, as to take *Benhadad* their King prisoner. But upon his application to *Ahab*, he was treated with great courtesy, and quickly set at full liberty.

THIS conduct of *Ahab*, as it was contrary to all the rules of good policy, so was it particularly displeasing to Almighty God; who had sent his Prophet twice to instruct *Ahab* how to manage the war, and to assure him of the victory. And this God did, partly to open *Ahab's* eyes, and make him see how he had sinned in suppressing his worship; and partly to make an example of *Benhadad*, who had behaved himself in this war with the highest contempt and defiance, both of the God and King of *Israel*.

AND therefore *Ahab* should not have dismissed him without God's leave, whose prisoner he was, to be disposed of as he should have directed. By releasing him so hastily, without consulting God who had delivered him into his hands, he brought a heavy sentence upon himself. For a Prophet presently came to him with this message, *Thus saith the Lord; Because thou hast let a man go out of thy hand, whom I had appointed to destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.*

HOW this sentence was fulfilled upon *Ahab*, we read in this xxii. chap. whence my Text is taken. After *Israel* had been at peace with *Syria* for about three

years, the war broke out again upon this occasion. *Jehoshaphat* King of *Judah* had contracted affinity with *Ahab*, for he had married his eldest son to *Ahab's* daughter, and he went to *Samaria* to make *Ahab* a visit. While he was there, *Ahab* complained of an injury which the *Syrian* did him, in detaining from him *Ramoth* a City in *Gilead*, contrary to the promise which *Benhadad* made, when he was taken prisoner in *Samaria*. This *Ramoth* properly belonged to the Tribe of *Gad*, on the other side *Jordan*; but because it bordered upon the *Syrians*, and gave them a good advantage over the *Israelites*, they could not find a heart to part with it, notwithstanding their promise.

*Ahab* having overthrown them twice in the last war, was encouraged to hope for the like success again, especially if *Jehoshaphat* would join forces with him: Whose assistance he took this opportunity to sollicit, and found him as compliant as his heart could wish. *Jehoshaphat* only desired that, according to the good old way of Religion in *Israel* and *Judah*, some Prophets might be consulted, that they might know whether their undertaking were agreeable to the will of God. *Ahab* quickly called together a large number of Prophets, no less than four hundred men, and put this question to them: *Shall I go up against *Ramoth-Gilead* to battle, or shall I forbear?* Which question when the Prophets had taken a short time to consider of, they unanimously answered, *Go up, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.*

W H E T H E R these men were those Prophets of the Groves, spoken of chap. xviii. who were not slain with *Baal's* Prophets, or whether they were bred in schools of ancient institution in *Israel*, as some think, because they prophesied in the Name of the Lord, certain

certain it is that they were false Prophets, as the event shewed; and such *Jehoshaphat* took them to be, which made him ask, whether there were not a Prophet of the Lord besides these, whom they might consult? *Abab* answered, there was one *Micaiah* at hand; but, says he, *I hate to have any concern with him; for he never prophesied a good thing of me in his life, but always evil.* But *Jehoshaphat* intimating that he hoped better, *Micaiah* was sent for.

SOME of the Jewish Doctors were of opinion, that this *Micaiah* was the Prophet who reproved *Abab* for his over-easy and hasty release of *Benhadad*, and showed him how by this rash act he owed God a life which the *Syrian* should have paid him; *Thy life*, says he, *shall go for his life.* For this freedom, they suppose, with great probability, that *Abab* threw him into prison; for he hated such a plain-dealer, and loved to be flattered, even at the expence of his own life and fortunes: And this is the reason why he knew *Micaiah* so particularly well, and could send for him so readily now when he wanted him.

BY the way, we must take care not to confound this *Micaiah*, as some have done, with the Prophet *Micah*, whose Book makes part of our Bible: For this lived under *Jehoshaphat* and *Abab*, the other under *Jotham* and *Abaz*, one hundred and fifty years after: This prophesied in *Israel*, the other in *Judah*.

THE messenger who was sent to fetch *Micaiah*, was very careful to inform him, how all the Prophets with one mouth assured the King, that his arms should prosper at *Ramoth-Gilead*: And, *I pray thee*, says he, *let thy word be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good.* But what? whether it was the word of God or not? Yes; for it was great pity that any

any thing should discompose the King's mind, now it was so sweetly charmed by the harmony of his Prophets. We see *Ahab*'s officer was a complete Courier: He served a Master who loved to be flattered, and he would not have him ruffled with an ungrateful truth, tho' it were to save his life. Such fine breeding and tender regards of Servants, have carried away many a Prince, with an easy passage, to utter destruction.

THIS sounded strange in the ears of *Micaiah*, and could not but move his indignation, to observe that the man thought him capable of prevaricating so basely, as to conceal one thing in his heart, and utter another with his lips. He was not to seek for an answer, and indeed it was the only one that could be given to such a request: *Whatsoever the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak.*

WHEN *Micaiah* came into the presence of the two Kings, who were sitting upon their Thrones in a spacious place, adorned with their royal robes, *Ahab* put the same question to him, as he had put to the rest of the Prophets: *Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall we forbear?* And the Prophet gave the very same answer as the others had done: *Go and prosper; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.*

BUT it is plain, from what follows, that he did not intend this for a serious answer; nor did *Ahab* take it for such. He spoke it with such a look and gesture and tone of voice, as shewed that he intended no more by it, than to ridicule and mimick the other Prophets.

FOR when *Ahab* adjured him to declare in good earnest what he had to say in the Name of the Lord,

he told him, that he saw in a vision all *Israel* scattered upon the hills, as sheep that had no shepherd: And that he heard the Lord say, *These have no master; let them return every man to his house in peace.* This *Abab* saw plain enough was an intimation, that he should fall in the battle, and that his people should flee. Whereupon he turned to *Jehoshaphat* and said, *Did not I tell you, that he would prophecy no good concerning me, but evil?*

*MICAIAH* then proceeds to tell him a second vision which he had concerning his Prophets. How he saw the Lord sitting on his Throne, and all the Host of Heaven standing by him, on his right hand, and on his left. And the Lord said, *Who will persuade Abab, that he may go and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?* And one proposed one way, and another another. At last there came forth a Spirit and stood before the Lord, and said, *I will persuade him.* And the Lord said, *Wherewith?* And the Spirit answered, *I will go forth, and be a lying Spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.* And he said, *Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also. Go forth, and do so.*

SUCH a consultation as this, was represented to the Prophet in his spiritual vision; not that the affair was really so transacted in the world of Spirits; for God who is Omnipotent and Omniscent, wants not to ask help or advice of his Creatures. But this is an easy, lively, and familiar way of acquainting us, that God in his just judgment had given up *Abab* for a prey, to be seduced by a lying Spirit and false Prophets, to go and fall at *Ramoth-Gilead*. It was one and the same lying Spirit, which instructed all the four hundred Diviners how to answer *Abab*'s question. And no doubt but he dictated his answer to every one of them

them in the very same words; to the end that both they and their King might be persuaded by this uniformity of words, to believe that it was a true Oracle.

A learned man ingeniously observes, that in these words, *The Lord shall deliver Ramoth-Gilead into the hand of the king*, there is an ambiguity, and that the word *King* may mean the *Syrian* as well as the *Israelite*. And true it is, that those evil Spirits which were the **Gods** of the Heathen, delivered their Oracles in ambiguous terms to save their reputation. For not being endued with that fore-knowledge of things which they pretended to, they framed their answers so artfully, as that they might be construed to comply with the event, whatever it might happen to be. And so the blame, in case of misadventure, was to rest, not upon the Oracle, but upon him who received it, and took it in a wrong sense. However, these ambiguities, in time, rendred the Oracles contemptible. And perhaps this was the reason why *Micaiah* made sport with this here before us. But this is certain, that the Spirit who dictated it, was a lying Spirit, for he plainly owned himself to be such. And his busines was to excite *Ahab* to venture upon his own destruction; which he knew he might effect, by telling him a pleasing lye, and making all his Prophets unanimous in it.

WHEN *Micaiah* had made an end of speaking, *Ahab*, and his Prophets were incensed above measure at him for what he had said. *Zedekiah*, who seems to have been the chief of the four hundred, struck him on the face; and the King remanded him to his prison, with a charge to the keeper to feed him with no better than a small quantity of bread and water, till

*Israel*

*Israel* should return from the war victorious. And this being done, they proceeded to *Ramoth-Gilead*.

NOW when they were come near the *Syrian* army, it was agreed between the two Kings, that *Abab* should enter the battle in a disguise, like a subordinate officer, I suppose, for he rode in his chariot; but that *Jehoshaphat* should appear like himself, in the habit of a King. The reason of this is evident. *Abab* knew that he should be chiefly aimed at, as the author of the war, and that it would presently end in favour of the *Syrians*, if he should be cut off. And indeed for these very reasons *Benhadad* had charged his captains, *to fight neither with small nor great, save with the king of Israel*. This brought *Jehoshaphat* into great danger of his life: For when the battle was joined, and the *Syrians* saw him in his royal apparel, they took him for the King of *Israel*, and pursued him with united forces. But when he behaved himself so, as to shew them they were mistaken, they left off pursuing him any farther. In 2 *Chron.* xviii. 31. it is said, that *Jehoshaphat* cried out, and the Lord helped him, and moved the pursuers to depart from him. Which intimates that his escape was narrow, and even miraculous; by which he was reproved for his great offence in joining alliance with an avowed enemy of God, and warned to be careful how he entred into such alliances for the future.

*AHAB*, mean while, was concealed under his disguise in another part of the field of battle. Concealed, I say, from the knowledge of men, but not from the eyes of God, who directed a random shot to find out a passage thro' the joints of his harness into his body, where it gave him his death's wound, tho' he died not immediately. As soon as he was wounded, he

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called out to his charioteer to drive him to some place out of the host, where he might have care taken of his wound without disturbance.

AND now he could be no longer concealed. The news of his disaster was quickly spread abroad thro' his army, to the great consternation no doubt of all his soldiers, who had been assured by him and his Prophets, that certain victory was decreed them from Heaven. But upon his shewing himself to them in his chariot, after his wound was dressed, tho' too feeble to support himself without help, they did their utmost, by fighting gallantly before him, to raise his Spirits, and revive him again. But all in vain; there was no stopping of his blood; which by continually issuing out of the wound, exhausted him so, that he died before the going down of the Sun.

THEN was fulfilled the vision of *Micaiah*, wherein he saw *Israel* scattered as sheep upon the Mountains, and returning home without their Master. For the *Israelites*, upon the death of their King, quitted the field; and the *Syrians* having obtained their end, in obedience to the command of their Master, did not pursue them.

THUS ended the life and reign of King *Ahab*, but this was but the beginning of those sufferings which were afterwards accomplished in his wife and children, and the more remote branches of his family. To die, as he did, in the field of battle, would scarce have deserved the name of a divine Judgment, if he had not gone to the war in contempt of God's warnings by the mouth of his Prophet. It certainly was a punishment which bare no manner of proportion to the black guilt of his sins.

FOR he sinned more than all the Kings of *Israel* that went before him. He so filled the land with idolatries, that the sin of *Jeroboam* was but a small one in comparison of his. By trampling upon the Law of God, demolishing his Altars, and killing or banishing his Prophets continually, he seemed to make it the full purpose of his heart and business of his life, to root out the Religion which he found established, and introduce Paganism in the room of it: But could any thing that is even feigned of the old Giants fighting against Heaven, exceed this impiety? For consider what a strict and manifold relation there was between God and the People of *Israel*; how he had magnified his loving-kindness to *Abraham* and the Patriarchs; in what a wonderful manner he brought them from among the *Egyptians*, and separated them from all other Nations, and raised them up a Lawgiver, and Judges who settled them in the Land of *Canaan*, under such a Government in Church and State, as was brought down by express revelation from Heaven, and contrived on purpose to exclude any mixture of Paganism or foreign Worship. Consider how God delighted to style himself the King, the Father, the Husband of *Israel*; how he chose them for his peculiar people and heritage above all Nations of the Earth, how he placed his Name and Worship among them, as in a fountain-head, whence the streams of Salvation might flow in time to all the ends of the Earth. Let us, I say, compute the reasons we find in holy Writ, why *Israel* should be God's People, and he should be their God; and then let us be astonished to find that there ever arose such a King in *Israel* as this *Abab*, who was so audacious as to fight against this God, to depose him from his dominion over *Israel*, to cast him out of

his

his own Inheritance; to undo all that he had been doing for many hundreds of years past and gone; to bring back those abominations which had polluted the Land, and caused it to spue out its old inhabitants: An attempt of this kind was a sin of such a monstrous size, that there is no taking any measure of it; it surpasses all that we can imagine.

HOWEVER, let us carry as just an estimate of it as we can along with us, in reading the History of *Ahab* and his Family, and then we shall not wonder at the sanguinary executions which were done upon him, root and branch, until that a full end was made of him. For it was fit that his punishment should be as notorious, as was his enmity against God.

THIS his enmity against God, made him an enemy to the World, and to himself, as it is natural for such abandoned wretches to be. What a horrid massacre did he commit upon *Naboth* and his Family, for the sake of his vineyard? which drew a heavy sentence upon him and his from the mouth of *Elijah*; and the divine Vengeance began to exact payment of him at this time. For after his death, as they were washing his bloody chariot in the pool of *Samaria*, the dogs were observed to lick his blood, according to the Prophet's word who had foretold this.

AS to himself, he was his own great enemy; for he had lost the power of seeing that which was for his real benefit, even when it was set before his eyes. What a tedious famine did he chuse to bring upon himself and his people, rather than hearken to the word of *Elijah*, by which he might easily have prevented it? And if he had regarded *Micaiah* as a Prophet of the Lord, which he did not deny him to be, he had not ended his days at *Ramoth-Gilead*. But these

Prophets

Prophets spoke plain, undisguised truths, according to the real mind of God; which *Abab* could not endure to hear. His delight was in those who always prophesied smooth things, who gave him a fair picture of his own merits and abilities, who spoke of his arms as invincible, and his success as infallible. These his admirers were his favourites and counsellors; and they took care so thoroughly to please him, as that in the end they ruined him.

THESE are fair warnings to us all, to be zealous for the Glory of God, and the sincere, impartial preaching of his word among us. The God of *Israel* is our God, for he is the Father of our Lord *Jesus Christ*; and consequently whatever he did for his people of old, is to be reckoned as done for us. The Miracles of Judgment and Mercy, of Power and Wisdom, which he wrought for them, he wrought for us; for they are standing monuments and evidences to us, that he is the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all the World. The Prophets which he sent to them, he hath sent to us, by preserving their Books, and conveying them to us, and ordering them by his Providence to be a part of the daily service of our Church. And besides his Prophets, he hath sent us his Son, of whom all the Prophets had spoken, together with the Apostles and Ministers of his Gospel. And the pains which have been taken, the lives which have been sacrificed, the moneys which have been expended in building Schools, Churches, Colleges, and raising revenues for this purpose, that God might be made known upon Earth, and the way of Salvation taught according to his word, are far beyond any estimate we can make of them.

AND now after all the miraculous means which God hath used to reveal himself to us, shall any of us presume to say, that his revelations are not necessary, but that the light of nature, or the common sense and reason of mankind, are sufficient to teach us to serve God acceptably, and lead us to all the happiness that we are capable of enjoying? Those who take upon them to exalt Nature, or Reason, as they call it, against, and even above Revelation, as many in our wretched days are bold enough to do, are as great Idolaters, as great enemies of God, as ever *Ahab* was, and they discover the same Spirit as he was acted by, to abolish the Law of God, to destroy, or at least to alienate those structures which have been raised for the propagating and teaching of Religion, and to slay the Prophets with the sword; if not with a sword of iron and steel, yet with that of extreme indigence, with a sword of cold and nakedness, of reproach and contempt, which may be the cause of natural, but never fails of occasioning a political death.

WHEREVER this Spirit of *Ahab* has prevailed, to the dethroning of God and his Laws and Worship in any Country, the consequences have been the same as happened to *Israel*: The Land has mourned under the scourge of famine, war, or some other desolating calamity, as might abundantly be shewed in the ancient Kingdoms of *Israel* and *Judah*, and other Countries which once were the joy of the whole Earth, while they maintained the worship of the true God among them; but when for their lukewarmness and infidelity they were over-run with the arms and superstition of the *Mahometans*, the honour of their cities was soon laid in the dust, and their sweet liberty, peace and plenty, and other enjoyments, were exchanged

changed for the yoke of slavery, oppression, and hardships of all sorts.

THIS should be a warning to us all, to hold fast the profession of our Christian Faith without wavering; and to account them our worst enemies, who are the declared enemies of *Jesus Christ*, who make it their endeavour to root out his Religion from amongst us. They are the contrivers not only of our eternal, but temporal damnation. For while they labour to deprive us of our Christian Ministry, and to extinguish the light of the Gospel in our Land, what are they doing, but opening a door to all the Legions of darkness, to pour in upon us, and confound us? What are they aiming at, but to let loose the reins to all the abominable lusts which our corrupt nature is capable of, and which render us odious to God and good men? If our world were filled with such people, as study to abolish the Religion of *Jesus Christ*, their blasphemies and corruptions would certainly awaken the divine Vengeance to consume them by as terrible judgments, as any generation of men ever suffered since the creation. They would quickly turn their habitations into a hell of misery as well as impiety. For to do that, there would need no more than the Hand of God against them; and it must be against them, as much as it is against the reprobate Spirits, whose image and similitude they have taken upon them by fighting against Heaven. We suffer too much from them as it is, in that imperfect state of Religion which their unhappy mixture among us hath left us; tho' the blessings of Heaven are not quite withdrawn from us, yet they are much impaired by those horrid blasphemies which provoke God to turn away the light of his countenance from us.

LET us therefore (if we desire to live even in the present state of things) let us beseech God to deliver us from false Prophets and lying Spirits, which have always been the ruin of the Country where they have prevailed: And let us pray, that God would endue the Ministers of his Religion with such an Apostolick Spirit, that they would suppress nothing of his revealed will, but preach it with such zeal, plainness, and sincerity, as may cause God to be known amongst us, and make the way of salvation easy and delightful, that we serving him as obedient children, may obtain the rewards of our obedience, even the blessings of this life, and of that which is to come, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord, &c.





# SERMON LXXI.

On the Eleventh Sunday after TRINITY.

MORNING.

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2 KINGS v. 18.

*In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my Master goeth into the House of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow my self in the House of Rimmon: when I bow down my self in the House of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.*

**T**HESE are the words of *Naaman*, Captain of the Host of the King of *Syria*; whether it was *Benhadad* or *Hazaël* who then reigned in *Damascus* is uncertain; but whoever it was, this Captain was in great esteem and favour with him, as being a Man of an extraordinary genius, and remarkably valiant, skilful, and successful in the Wars, which are the three greatest things that can be said of a Soldier: But his body was far from being answerable to the Perfections of his mind, and the same may be said of him, which the old *Romans* said of their Emperor *Galba*, *male habitat anima Galbae*, that his great Soul dwelt in a sorry tenement; for he was

infected with an obstinate leprosie, a disease which is very predominant in those eastern Countries.

NO doubt but he had tried every thing which his friends could recommend to him, as likely to cure him; but all to no purpose: At last a little Maid, whom the *Syrians* had taken captive on the borders of *Israel*, and who was preferred to wait on *Naaman's* Lady, cryed out one day to her Mistress, *Would God my Lord were with our Prophet in Samaria; he would certainly recover him of his Leprosie.* These Words being related to *Naaman*, he was so pleased with the overture, that he presently waited on the King his Master about it, and begged his leave to go to *Samaria*, and apply to the Prophet there for his cure. The King readily complyed with his request, and wrote a letter to King *Jehoram*, one of the Sons of *Ahab*, then reigning in *Samaria*, to certify him that the Bearer was his prime Minister and Favourite, and *I send him to you*, says he, *that you may cure him of his Leprosie*, i. e. to take care that he might be cured by the Prophet. But this not being so plainly exprest in the Letter, the King of *Israel* thought it was a handle which the *Syrian* took to pick a quarrel, and begin a War with him; for *am I a God*, says he, *that he sends to me to recover a Man of his Leprosie?* This threw him into loud complaints, which were quickly spread, with the occasion, all over *Samaria*.

WHEN the Prophet *Elisha* heard the news, he sent to the King, desiring that *Naaman* might be committed to his care, and he hoped to convince him that he had Power from God to heal him. This is what *Naaman* wanted; for from the Prophet it was, and not from the King, that he expected his cure.

cure. So presently he went with his horses and chariots, and stood at the door of the House of *Elijah*, not doubting but the Prophet, as soon as he knew who was there, and what he wanted, would come out to him, and pray over him, and stroke his sores with his hand, in order to heal them. But when the Prophet took no more notice of him, than only to send him a Message by his servant, that he should go and dip himself seven times in the River *Jordan*; this threw the great Man into a transport of Passion: 'What need I to have come thus far from home to wash my self in a River? Are not the Waters of *Damascus* as healing as any Waters in *Israel*? Might not I have been cleansed with them, if washing would effect the cure?' So he was going away in great indignation. But his servants, who had cooler sentiments, humbly entreated him not to depart before he had made tryal of the Prophet's prescription. 'My Father, said they, (this was a term of the greatest love and respect, and given to the greatest Princes in those Countries) 'My Father, if the Prophet had ordered you to do some great thing for the recovery of your health; if he had sent you on a tedious pilgrimage, or enjoyned you to build a stately Temple, or punished you with a long abstinence from your common food, or obliged you to anoint your self with a nauseous unguent, would you not have done it? How much more should you comply, when he only bids you wash seven times in pure water, and promises that you shall come out a sound Man?

HERE *Naaman* shewed himself to be a Person of a tractable Spirit, his heat was over, and his ears open to reason. 'You say very true, says he; we

‘ are come thus far to ask the advice of an eminent Prophet; and his prescription is easy and innocent; I will try it directly.’

SO he went and dipped himself seven times in *Jordan*; but when he came up the seventh time, he was quite another man, perfectly regenerate and born again, his Flesh was as fair and clear as that of a young Child, and his Soul was filled with admiration of God, and convictions of his Omnipotence and Omnipresence. To the Prophet he returns with all his Retinue, and after low reverence paid to him, he frankly professes that he was now very sure, that there was no God in all the Earth, but only in *Israel*. And fain he would have rewarded the Prophet with a noble present; for he had brought with him ten **Talents** of Silver, six thousand pieces of Gold, and ten changes of Raiment for that purpose. But *Elisha* withstood his most pressing importunity, as being resolved to maintain the honour of his Character, and that it should never be said in *Damascus*, that the great Prophet of *Samaria* was a mercenary man, and had been paid for his Cure. Indeed by this refusal, he ascribed the whole virtue of this healing to God, and owned himself to be no more than God’s instrument, who had given directions by his Mouth how it should be wrought.

*NAAMAN* cannot yet take his leave, without farther professions of his resolution to Worship the God of *Israel*, and he begs of the Prophet that he would be pleased to give him two mules burden of Earth, to carry with him to *Damascus*: and to what end? Why, to raise an Altar there for this purpose, as he plainly intimates in the next words; For, says he, thy Servant will henceforth Offer neither Burnt-Offering nor Sacrifice

Sacrifice to any other God but the *Lord*. And as he had found a singular healing virtue in the waters of *Israel*, so he thought the Earth of that Land was better and more acceptable than all other, to build an Altar for the Service of God. But why could he not take of this Earth any where by the way, without troubling *Elisa* about it? Why, because he was desirous to have the Prophet's Blessing along with it, which he esteemed as a good Consecration of it; and I see no reason to doubt but this request was granted him: The Prophet, who had done so much for the healing of his Body, would never deny him this boon for the welfare of his Soul.

AND whereas he had obliged himself for the time to come, to worship no other God but the God of *Israel*, he begs that it might not be imputed to him as a breach of this Vow, that when he attended his Master, as his Place required, in the Temple of *Rimmon*, he should be forced to incline his Body, as often as the King who leaned upon him, should bow in his Worship: *Naaman* declares that he would not intend any Religious Worship by this motion, and desires that it may be interpreted as no more than a civil respect and obsequiousness to his Master. This was a frank and open declaration of his intentions, and the Prophet dismisses him kindly upon it, and bids him go in Peace.

THIS has occasioned a famous question upon this case, *viz.* Whether the Prophet took upon him to dispense with an idolatrous compliance in this *Syrian*. For whatever his Mind and Affections were, yet it is plain that the Action would carry an Appearance of Idolatry in it.

NOW

NOW Idolatry, in the eye of God's Law, was a Sin of the first magnitude, and prohibited upon pain of death without Mercy. And it was a most eminent part of the Prophets Office to oppose this Sin, and to denounce God's Judgments against it. The Prophets were raised up from time to time almost for this very purpose. But we need go no farther than *Elijah*, the Master of this very *Elisha*, for an instance of Zeal against mingling and combining true and false Religion together. In that most numerous Assembly of Priests and People at Mount *Carmel*, related in *1 Kings xviii*. *Elijah* bid them chuse God or *Baal* for their Worship, and follow the one or the other intirely, and *not continue to hale and trim it between two Opinions*. And when the Priests of *Baal* were manifestly convicted of worshipping a false God, he caused them to be all put to death upon the Spot: So that I cannot think that his Scholar and Successor *Elisha* would say any thing that might be drawn to countenance such a mixture of Truth and Error.

IT may be said indeed, that the Law against Idolatry could be executed no where but in the Kingdoms of *Israel* and *Judah*, for which it was enacted; and that the Prophet had no power to call *Naaman* to a rigorous Observance of it; but ought to be well satisfied, as he seems to have been, that this great man's Heart was wholly turned to the worship of the true God, and that his supporting his Master in the House of *Rimmon* could not have an ill influence upon any worshippers there, who were already of the King's Religion; and *Naaman* did not undertake to Convert them, but only to confine his own worship to the true God.

WE must confess that these circumstances, with some others which might be added to them, make

*Naaman's*

Naaman's Case to differ very much from that of a few in the land of *Israel*, who should have appeared in any of *Baal's* Temples at the time of his Worship. For however such a one might protest the Piety of his Intentions, and that his thoughts were all the while directed to the right Object of Divine Worship, yet by his presence there he would actually violate the Covenant of his God, and give others reason to conclude, that he join'd in Communion with Idolaters. And so his example might have a bad influence. Whereas *Naaman*, when he went into the House of *Rimmon*, did nothing against the Laws of his Country, but rather complied with them. But if this declaration which he here makes, that he would worship none but the God of *Israel*, and that whenever he should enter into the Temple of *Rimmon*, it should not be upon a Religious account, but only to pay a civil respect and service to the King his Master; If this, I say, was made known to the King and Court at *Damascus*, and I cannot imagine how it could be concealed from them, when he speaks it here so openly before a large retinue of his Domesticks and Citizens; then, I say, *Naaman* dealt most ingenuously in this Affair, and I cannot see what can be charged as criminal in this his conduct.

IT may be objected, that the King knowing this to be the resolution of his Servant, would not make any farther use of his Assistance in his Religious Worship. This may be very true; and yet he might still see reason to favour him, and continue him at the head of his Army. There are good grounds to think that the Eastern Princes of ancient times did not rigorously insist with their great Ministers, that they should worship the Deity after the same Religious Rites and Forms with

with themselves. We must not suppose that *Joseph*, while he dwelt in *Egypt*, or *Moses* while he was educated there, or *David*, while he bare Arms under *Abish* King of *Gath*, or *Daniel* while he was in the Court of *Babylon*, or *Nehemiah* under *Artaxerxes*, were at all required to comply with the King's Religion: we know they were excused. Their respective Princes saw by their Conversation, that they were men fearing God; and were satisfied, by the great things which they performed, that they were endued with a Divine Spirit, and therefore they left them entirely free to communicate with the Deity in such a method of Devotion as they apprehended to be most acceptable to him. And it is highly probable, that the King of *Syria*, when he beheld the miraculous Cure which was wrought upon his Servant, and had heard the Vow which he had made upon that occasion, to worship none but the God which had healed him, readily gave him his consent to observe his Vow, without lessening him at all in the Honours and Offices which he enjoy'd under him. For among all the Idolatries of those times, they had so much true Piety as to believe, that there was a Gracious and Merciful God, who sometimes vouchsafed Miraculous Cures to men; and they esteemed the Parties so cured, to be particularly dear to him who had healed them, and accounted it impious to hinder them from making such grateful acknowledgments as they had vow'd to their supreme Benefactor.

*NAAMAN*, 'tis true, discovers his Apprehensions by his discourse, that he should still be obliged, as formerly, to accompany his Master to the *Pagan* Temple; which he humbly hopes God will not im-

pute

pute to him as a Sin, because he will take care to perform no act of Religion there. This shows the sincerity of his Conversion, and how cautious he was of doing any thing which might seem to be inconsistent with it. He feared it would look like disloyalty to the God of *Israel*, which made him uneasy at the thoughts of it. But the Prophet, who was enlightened by the Divine Spirit, saw that no hardship would be put upon him, but that the King his Master would treat him with that tenderness and clemency which was common from Princes to their Favourites in such cases: and therefore he gives him his Blessing, and bids him go home in peace and fear nothing.

I verily believe it was in contemplation of the kind treatment that he should find at home, and not out of condescension to any sinful Infirmity, as some have conceited, that *Elisha* dismiss *Naaman* with the blessing of Peace. It had been a contradiction to his Character, and an unworthy conclusion of the Heavenly things which were just now said and done, if the Prophet had neglected to assert any part of the Honour of God, when a case was proposed that affected it, and he had so fair an invitation to declare his judgment upon it. The answer was abundantly too short, and in truth nothing to the purpose, had not the Prophet, when he gave it, uttered it with an accent and gesture which implied that all would succeed very well; ' You shall have it in your power ' to perform your Vow honestly; trouble not yourself ' with imaginary hardships; That God whom you ' have chosen to serve, will justifie your choice of ' him in facilitating your Service. Set your Heart ' at rest, and go in Peace.'

THOSE

THOSE who have not seen this to be the Prophet's meaning, have drawn such conclusions from this passage, as are very prejudicial to Religion and a good Conscience. Some flatter themselves from hence, that they are allowed to bend their Religion to their worldly Circumstances ; and may dissemble and temporize, and do those things which they secretly condemn, rather than lose their preferments, and bring themselves and their Families to Poverty, by adhering to truth, and acting a plain and honest part. ‘ For, ‘ say they, did not *Elisha* consent that *Naaman* should ‘ go to his Master’s Church, and bow to his *Syrian* ‘ Gods and Goddesses, rather than throw himself out ‘ of his great Offices, by his non-compliance? Why ‘ then may not we sacrifice an Article of Faith, or a ‘ clause of the moral Law, to the pleasure of an earth- ‘ ly Benefactor, on whom we depend? Why may not ‘ we make advantages in our Dealings, by striking out ‘ of the ways of Truth and Justice, and promise our ‘ selves the divine Pardon for it, as well as other ‘ Men?’

THIS is a dangerous way of reasoning, and cannot be grounded upon the Text here before us, if the interpretation which I have given of it, be sound and good. But whether I or others have hit the true sense of it, this we all know, that we have no need to build our Faith or Practice, upon this or any other obscure passage of Scripture, when we have so much pure and clear light from thence to direct us in our way. We all know, that the first and most fundamental Laws of our Religion are, *that we love the Lord our God with all our Heart and Soul, and Strength, and Mind*; that we give not his glory to any Creature, but worship and serve him only as our God. We have manifold

manifold injunctions laid upon us, to put our whole trust and confidence in God, to obey him in all things, to walk in his ways with a perfect and upright Heart, and not to be moved with difficulties to turn to the right hand or the left, but to wait upon him for a happy issue out of them. We are often put in mind to have the fear of God continually before our Eyes, and not to suffer the fear of Man, or of any other Creature, to prevail against it. All these duties are recommended to us, in the most plain and indisputable terms. And therefore if we cannot fully satisfie our selves about the practice of *Naaman*, or any other great Man, we need not be concerned about it ; we know what obedience and worship God requires of us in general, though we do not know what tryals and hardships we may be called to undergo in the practical part. When such hardships come in our way, we are allowed to exert all our Skill and Wisdom in stemming the Tyde, and getting clear of them. But at the same time we must be careful not to make Shipwreck of Faith and a good Conscience. Nothing forbids us to study to please Men, provided we do not go so far as to displease God ; and we are obliged to have a regard to our temporal Interests, and wish that they may be consistent with our duty to God ; but we must not expect always to find them so ; for then there could be no such thing as suffering for God's sake. In short, if we sincerely love God, he will direct us in difficult cases, and shew us the way wherein we should go, and give us grace to adhere stedfastly to him, whenever a competition arises between our duty and our interest.

BUT 2dly, There are another sort of People, who run from this fault which they charge upon *Naaman*,  
into

into a quite contrary extreme, and are as fearful of coming into our Christian Churches, as if they were so many Houses of Idolatry. A separation which even *Naaman* himself would wonder at, were he to come among us, and be told, that we all profess to worship the same God, and only differ in some modes and circumstances of our Worship. But if he should hear those who style themselves *Christians*, call the Ministers of Christ, Priests of *Baal*, would he not be astonished to hear them thus blaspheme their own Master, and conclude that their Souls were infected with a worse Leprosie than that which his body once laboured under? A Leprosie which all the Waters of Baptism have not been able to cleanse, nor the Prayers and Hands of the Prophets to drive away, though applied to it now for several Generations.

I wish they would make a spiritual application of all the circumstances of this great Man's History, and not despise the administration of our Prayers and Sacraments, because they are all made common, plain and easie.

LET them learn of his Counsellors who persuaded him, to persuade themselves that the plainness and easiness of these ordinances should be a great inducement to them to joyn in them, and to try what benefit they can reap by them. *How can these waters of Jordan cleanse my Leprosie?* said *Naaman*. How can the water of Baptism, and the Bread and Wine in the other Sacrament, produce those great effects for which they are instituted? say the Enemies of these Ordinances. Why, by virtue of this very Institution, because a great Prophet has blessed them, and appointed them to be the means of Salvation. *Every one, says he, that is born of Water and of the Spirit, every one that eateth*

*my Flesh and drinketh my Blood, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, and there enjoy eternal Life.*

DO we believe our Prophet, when he affirms this? Then if he had injoyn'd us to perform much harder Services for the attainment of his promises, common prudence would have told us, it was our best way to obey him. But now, that he has made these small and easie observances the conditions of our Happiness, how much more readily should we hearken to him, how much more punctually should we attend upon them?

LET us be sensible of his infinite Goodness and Mercy to us, in making our Yoke so easie, and our burden so light; and let us not doubt but he will accomplish his own Ends by his own Means, and as surely regenerate our Souls by his easie Ordinances, as *Elisha* renewed *Naaman's* Body by the Waters of *Jordan*.

FOR a greater than *Elisha* is with us; he that sanctified Water in the River *Jordan* to the mystical washing away of Sin, is with us; he that cured the Lepers, he that healed all Sickness, he that raised the dead with the bare word of his Mouth, is with us. To him, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c.





## S E R M O N LXXII.

*On the Eleventh Sunday after TRINITY.*

E V E N I N G.

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2 K I N G S ix. 1, 2, 3.

*And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thy hand, and go to Ramoth-Gilead. And when thou comest thither, look out there Jebu the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber. Then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel. Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not.*



N the nineteenth Chapter of the former Book we read how God commanded *Elijah* to do this thing, which we here find done fifteen years after by his successor *Elisha*. Whereupon it may be demanded how it came to be so long neglected. Some think that *Elijah* anointed *Jebu* presently after he had received

ceived directions about it, only to give him an earnest of the Sovereignty, as *Samuel* had given to *David*, without putting him into the immediate possession of it. But there is not the least ground in sacred Writ for this opinion. It is more agreeable to what we find written, to say, that *Ahab*'s humiliation for the murder of *Naboth*, had moved God to defer the judgment pronounced upon his family, to this time. The execution of it was left to *Elisha*, who did not go about it in his own person, as being too well known to perform it with secrecy, and not young and nimble enough to make a quick escape after the work was done.

FOR this purpose therefore he chuses out of the school or college of the Prophets, an active young man, and gives him a box of oil in his hand, and sends him to *Ramoth-Gilead* to anoint *Jehu*, the General of the *Israelitish* forces, King over *Israel*.

THE *Jews* think (as their opinion is represented by a learned Commentator) that none of the Kings of *Israel* were anointed, but either at the first promotion of a family to the Throne, or when there was a question about the succession. For had it not been for the faction of *Adonijah*, there had been no need of *Solomon*'s unction. The reason why *Jehu* was anointed at this time, was, because the succession was to be translated out of the right line of the house of *Ahab*, into his family, which had no right to the Kingdom but meerly by the divine Appointment.

THE young Prophet, being fully persuaded that this was the Will of God, and that he would protect him in this hazardous enterprize of anointing a new King over *Israel*, while *Joram* was yet living, went to *Ramoth-Gilead*, which was now in the hands

of the *Israelites*. For *Joram*, pursuing the war which his Father *Ahab* had begun, proved more successful in it, and had recovered this City from the *Syrians*. But having received many wounds in his encounters with the enemy, he was returned to his palace in *Jezeel* to be healed of them, and had left his Captains, of whom *Jehu* was chief, to maintain his conquest against *Hazaël* King of *Syria*. When the Prophet came thither, the Captains were sitting in a room together: He went boldly in to them, and looking upon *Jehu*, desired him to step aside with him, for that he had a secret to impart to him. *Jehu*, to prevent any mistake, bid him say plainly who it was that he wanted to speak with; and upon his repeating it, that he would speak with him, *Jehu* stepped aside with him into a private room.

WHEN they two were together alone, the Prophet took out his box of oil, and poured some of it on *Jehu*'s head, saying, *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I have anointed thee King over the people of the Lord, even over Israel*. Then he told him for what purpose it was, that he had invested him with this power; *viz.* That he might execute God's Judgments upon the house of *Ahab*, for the cruel murders which they had committed upon his Prophets, and upon *Naboth* and other good men. For which murders, as well as for their idolatries and outrageous offences against the worship of God, this family was devoted to be cut off, as the houses of *Jeroboam* and *Baasha* had been cut off before them: And that *Jezebel* should come to the most shameful end, as being the most guilty of all the family.

AS soon as the Prophet had given this charge, he tarried not for *Jehu*'s answer, but opened the door,

and

and fled away with all speed, as his Master *Elisha* had commanded him, lest what he had done should be discovered, and the rest of the Captains might apprehend him for treason against the reigning King. This, humanly speaking, was a just precaution, tho' the event presently shewed that no man there would have laid hands on him.

WHEN he was gone, *Jehu* returned to his company, with a great concern, no doubt, in his countenance, which they justly imputed to something which he had heard from that messenger. Whereupon they asked him what that strange man had said to him. He answered, *Ye know the man, and his communication*; intimating his suspicion, that he thought they had listened and overheard all that had passed. But when they utterly denied it, he frankly told them, that the man was a Prophet, and had anointed him in the Name of the Lord to be King over *Israel*, on purpose to execute the divine Judgments upon the house of *Ahab*, as above. This they no sooner heard, but they all unanimously consented (so powerfully did God move their hearts) to acknowledge *Jehu* for their King; which they might do with the greater freedom, because King *Foram*, as I noted before, was gone from *Ramoth-Gilead* to *Jezreel*. In this disposition the Captains suddenly raised a Throne and Canopy, which they composed of their own robes, and set *Jehu* thereon, and proclaimed him King with sound of Trumpet.

THIS was an auspicious beginning; but *Jehu* told them, that if they would make the best of their own advantages, they should set watchmen at the gates of *Ramoth-Gilead*, who should suffer none to go out of the City, and carry the news of what they were do-

ing to *Joram* in *Jezeel*; for that it would be their best way to go themselves with all expedition, and surprize him before he knew any thing of the matter.

ACCORDINGLY *Jehu* ordered his chariot to be got ready, and took a good company of his friends and soldiers, and drove with all speed along the road to *Jezeel*.

NOW it was the custom in those days, that at whatsoever City or Town the King happened to be, a watchman stood upon the tower or highest place in the City, to look out, and give notice if he saw any one coming in haste, that the King might not be surprized with any sudden misadventure.

THE watchman at *Jezeel* had got sight of *Jehu* and his company, as soon as they came within his view, and gave notice to those below, who acquainted the King that a company of soldiers were upon the road from *Ramoth-Gilead*. *Joram* sent out a horseman to meet them, and see if all were well at *Ramoth*: Who when he came up, asked, *Is it peace?* *Jehu* bid him not trouble himself about peace, but come into his rear, and follow him; which he durst not refuse to do, seeing there were many horsemen, and he could not escape them. And just so he served a second messenger; which when the watchman of *Jezeel*, who observed all that passed, had reported, together with his opinion, that he took the chief man to be *Jehu*; King *Joram*, together with his nephew *Abaziah* King of *Judah*, who was come to visit him, took each of them their chariot, and went out to meet *Jehu*. And as the Providence of God ordered it, they met him in the very plat of ground in the suburbs of *Jezeel*, which *Abab* their Ancestor had taken from *Naboth*. When they came up with him, *Joram* called out to him,

him, and asked him if all things were well and in a peaceable state: But *Jehu*, who came to do the execution which God's Prophet had injoin'd him not many hours before, answered roughly, *What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts are so many?* Whoredoms properly denote corporal defilements, and by a figure they are used to signify idolatry. For God is as a husband to his Church, and they his Spouse. When therefore they worship idols, they forsake the true husband, and prostitute themselves to adulterers. In this spiritual sense the words whoredom, fornication, and adultery, are often used in Scripture. Many are of opinion that *Jezebel* was an adulteress as well as an idolatress; and being thus abandoned to the two greatest of sins, no wonder if she was ensnared by those reprobate Spirits with whom she communicated, in the infernal arts of sorcery and witchcraft, which are here laid to her charge, and meant, I don't question, in a literal sense.

*Joram*, upon hearing the words of *Jehu*, and perceiving that he intended violence, turned his chariot and fled for his life, crying out to his kinsman *Ahaziah*, that they were betrayed. But *Jehu* discharged an arrow with his full strength, which shot *Joram* thro' the heart, so that immediately he fell down dead in his chariot. And that his servants might not carry him away and bury him in the City, *Jehu* ordered one of his own companions in arms to take the body, and throw it into some ditch or pit in *Naboth's* vineyard. *For, says he, you may remember, that when you and I rode in the guards of his father Ahab, when he came to take possession of this vineyard, the Lord passed this sentence upon him and his by the prophet Elijah; I have seen the blood of Naboth and*

*the blood of his sons which thou hast cruelly shed for the sake of this vineyard ; and I will surely requite it upon thee in this place. Now therefore let us cast him into that ditch, and fulfil the divine threatening.* And this was the end of *Joram*, the second son of *Ahab*, and the second after him in the throne of *Israel* : For his elder brother *Abaziah* died without any son, by a fall which he had in his palace at *Samaria*.

AS for *Abaziah* King of *Judah*, who was now in company with *Joram*, when he saw the fate of his uncle, he fled, as he had reason, the way toward *Samaria*, for he had no hope of getting into his own Kingdom. But *Jehu* called out to his men to strike him in his chariot. They did so, and wounded him, but not so as to dispatch him upon the spot. But his horses being too fleet for his pursuers, he escaped to *Megiddo*, and tarried there for a while : Whence his servants quickly removed him to *Samaria*, which was hard by, and a safer place, and there he concealed himself for some time. But it is said, 2 *Chron. xxii.* that *Jehu* sent men thither to make search for him, and that they found him out, and brought him to *Jehu* ; at whose command they slew him, and gave his body to his servants, who carried him to *Jerusalem*, and buried him in the royal sepulcher there, by *Jehu's* allowance, because he was descended from the good King *Jehoshaphat*.

BUT when I call *Jehoshaphat* a good King, I must except that action of his which brought his grandson to this miserable end : It was the affinity which he contracted with the house of *Ahab*, by marrying his son and heir *Joram*, to *Athaliah* the daughter of *Ahab*. 'Tis very likely he did this with a view to maintain peace and a good understanding between

between the two Kingdoms of *Israel* and *Judah*. But whatever success he might have this way, 'tis plain that he displeased God by this alliance, and in the main he paid dear for it. For first, he had like to have lost his life in joining forces with *Ahab* to recover *Ramoth-Gilead*: And heard a melancholy sentence from *Jehu* the son of *Hanani* the Prophet, who went to him upon that occasion, and expostulated with him, saying, *Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord.* Secondly, When afterwards he assisted this *Joram* the son of *Ahab*, against the King of *Moab*, 2 Kings iii. he was in great danger of perishing for want of water. Thirdly, When he went partner with *Abaziah*, *Ahab*'s eldest son, in building a fleet which was to sail to *Ophir* for gold, *Eliezer* prophesied against him, saying, *Because thou hast joined thy self with Abaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works:* And the ships were so shattered at the port at *Ezion-Geber*, where they were made, that they were not able to sail. Fourthly, When his son *Jehoram*, whom he had married to *Ahab*'s daughter, succeeded him in the throne of *Judah*, he presently embraced the idols of her family, as it often happens in such marriages; and slew all his brethren, even six Princes, the sons of his Father, which he is thought to have done at the instigation of his wife *Athaliah*, that they might make no opposition to the establishment of her idolatry. Fifthly, This alliance of *Jehoshaphat* with the house of *Ahab*, was the destruction of his grandson *Abaziah*, by the hand of *Jehu*, as before related. Lastly, when *Athaliah* the mother of *Abaziah* saw that this her son was dead, she made it her busines to destroy all the royal branches of the house of *David*,

*2 Kings xi.* such children, I suppose, as her husband had by other wives; or any in general who were not descended from her self. So that, as I said before, *Jehosaphat* paid dear for his affinity with the house of *Abab*. And just was it in God, thus to punish him. All his personal misfortunes, and the tragedies in his family, were owing to this one presumptuous sin, his marrying the heir of his Kingdom into a profane idolatrous family; whereby he manifestly exposed the true Religion of his whole Kingdom to the utmost hazard. For even an Ideot could have told him, that an idolatrous wife was very likely to pervert an orthodox husband. He could not be so inconsiderate as not to think of this, and foresee it. And therefore the small regard which he paid to this consideration, was an argument of his supine neglect, to say no worse, of the continuance of the worship and fear of the true God in his Family and Kingdom.

SOME are of opinion that *Jehu* exceeded his commission in killing *Abaziah* King of *Judah*. But in justification of him, it must be observed, *First*, That his commission was general, to cut off the whole house of *Abab* without exception; and this King was of his house by the mother's side. *Secondly*, *Abaziah* did evil in the sight of the Lord, like the house of *Abab*; he served *Baal* as they did: For his mother and relations of that side were his counsellors, as is expressly affirm'd *2 Chron. xxii.* *Thirdly*, 'Tis here likewise said, that *the destruction of Abaziah was of God*, who so ordered it, that he should be visiting *Joram* just ~~at~~ that time, when God had anointed *Jehu*, and commanded him to arise and cut off the house of *Abab*. So that his partaking

partaking of the same blood, and the same Idolatries with *Joram*, were the occasions of his perishing by the same judgment with him.

*JEHU* having thus cut off the branches, proceeds to the root. He enters *Jezreel*, and as he rode along the street, *Jezebel*, in a dress unsuitable for her at any time, especially upon this occasion, looked out at her window, and called to him in a way of reproach, saying, *Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?* The History of this *Zimri* may be found 1 Kings xvi. where it appears, that he was servant of *Elah* King of *Israel*, and a captain of his chariots: Against whom he conspired, and taking his opportunity, when *Elah* was drinking himself drunk at his steward's house at *Tirzah*, he went in, and smote him and killed him, and reigned in his stead. *Zimri* kill'd not only *Elah*, but all the family of *Baasha* his Father, he left none of his kinsfolk or friends alive, but destroyed them all, according to the word of the Lord which he spake by *Jebu* the Prophet: *For all the sins of Baasha and of Elah his son, by which they made Israel to sin: i. e. they were very bad Governors;* and as such God had threatned them by his Prophet, and executed his threatnings by *Zimri*. But his case and *Jebu's* were very different, especially in two respects. *First*, In that *Zimri*, tho' he executed what God had threatned, yet he had no design to serve God in it, he had no commission from him to do it; whereas *Jebu* was anointed of God King over *Israel*, for this very purpose, that he should destroy the house of *Abab*. *Secondly*, *Zimri* having no design to reform any of the sins of his predecessor, God cut him short, for he reigned but seven days: Whereas *Jebu*, tho' he did not work a thorough

thorough reformation, yet he did good service in rooting out the idolatry of *Baal* which *Jezebel* had brought in. For which reason he and his family were established in the Kingdom to the fourth Generation.

A N D therefore when *Jezebel* upbraided *Jehu* with *Zimri*'s treason, as tho' what the one did against the house of *Ahab*, were as unwarrantable as the other's acting against the family of *Baasha*; she either did not know, or would not acknowledge, the great difference between them, *viz.* that *Jehu* had the divine Authority on his side, which made that a Duty in him, which in *Zimri* was contrary to Law and Duty, for want of such authority.

*JEHU* returned no answer to this reproach; but called out to those who were about *Jezebel*, to throw her out at the window, which they did; and she was dashed to pieces on the pavement, and he rode over her, and trod her under foot. Then he went in to eat and drink; and presently sent to see for the body of *Jezebel*, in order to give it burial: But those whom he sent, could find no more of her, than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. Which when they had told him, he presently recollected the prophecy of *Elijah*, which he seems to have forgot before; *That the dogs should eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and that her carcase should lie there as dung upon the face of the field, so mangled and devoured, that men should not be able to say, This is Jezebel.*

U P O N the whole, this Chapter affords us a most pregnant proof of the truth of Prophecy, and the certainty of the divine Threatnings. For when this sentence which was now executed, was first pronounced near fifteen years before, *Ahab* and his family

were

were then in a flourishing condition. However, when he heard it, he did not make light of it, but put himself in mourning, and was much afflicted about it: Which moved God to defer it longer than he first intended. *I will not, says he, bring the evil in his days, but in his sons days.* And how punctually and surprizingly all was fulfilled upon his sons, we have heard: And may farther observe how immediately their destruction came from Heaven. For it is reasonable to think that *Jebu* had hitherto merited well of the house of *Ahab*, otherwise they would not have advanced him so high, as to have made him chief captain of the army. And it is as likely that he would have still continued the same obedience and kind services to them, had he not been discharged from such duty by the express Oracle of God, had he not been raised by him to the royal Dignity, on purpose that *Ahab's* family might be deposed and destroyed. But when he was once anointed and called of God to this work, we see what a change it made in him, and in all the rest of the Captains that were about him, so that they went as readily against their Master *Ahab's* family, as if he had been a common enemy.

IS not this a plain demonstration, that Princes reign by the will of God, that he sets up one and puts down another, and turns the hearts and affections of men to favour such changes as he sees fit? So that he who has the power, shall fall; and he who has no power shall rise up, and rule in his stead, whenever the most High decrees that it shall be so.

LET no man therefore glory in his abundance of friends, riches and honours, or despair in the want of them: For they are but secondary causes of the happiness of this life. Of themselves they are not able

able to help or hinder this happiness. They are all at the command and disposal of him, who is the only fountain of goodness, who gives them the virtue and faculty of serving us, and without whose blessing they are all insipid, worthless, helpless vanities. Or rather the best of them are so many poisons and arrows of death, to consume us from off the face of the Earth, when by our rebellion against God, we make our selves the objects of his hatred and indignation.

WAS it any protection to *Jezebel*, that she was the daughrer, the wife, the mother of Kings? Did her powerful alliances support her in her war against the King of Heaven? No doubt but she reckoned much upon her advantages, that she was above the Laws, and might, without asking any ones leave, bring the Gods of her own Country into the Land of *Israe*l. And to tell her that this Land was the heritage of another God, was but to move her scorn and contempt. Perhaps too she despised his threatenings of what he would do to her and her Family, as looking upon the execution to be impossible. And she triumphed for some years in doing her own pleasure. But how bitter was all this in the end? All that had been threatned was executed at last, with as much shame and ignominy, as could have lighted upon the meanest family. And that which added to this calamity was, that it was executed by the hands of her own subjects.

CAN Princes hope that men will have the grace to live in subjection to them, while they themselves are rebelling against the great Sovereign of all the World, by whose Power they reign, and for whose Glory they ought to govern? *Jezebel* was mistaken, when she thought her self mistress of the chariots

and

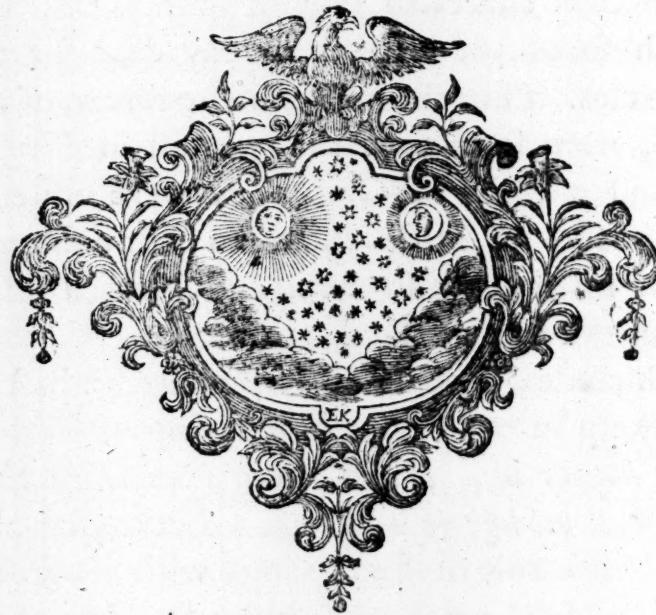
and horsemen of *Israel*; the God of *Israel*, whom she had reproached and blasphemed, had them all at his disposal, and when he saw fit, he made them her enemies, and turned their arms against her.

LET not then the greatest earthly Potentates neglect the Honour and Worship of God; for in so doing they neglect their own safety, since it is he alone who subdueth their people under them, and uniteth the unruly wills and affections of men in the bonds of subjection and obedience. Not but that publick blessings are many times vouchsafed to the unthankful and unholy; to those who forsake the ways of God, and put away the knowledge of him far from them. But when God comes to reckon with them, as he always doth sooner or later, they pay dear for their abused mercies. Thus the houses of *Jeroboam*, of *Baasha*, and *Abab*, were for a time the greatest in *Israel*; but being found enemies of God, they were visited with such judgments as made them an astonishment and proverb of misery to all men, and blotted out their name from the face of the Earth.

TO conclude; Let us all, from the highest to the lowest, lay up in our hearts that saying of God to *Eli*, *Those that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed*. Let us be assured, that this is the rule of his dealings with mankind, not in some few, but numberless instances. Let this open our eyes to see their fatal delusion, who would persuade us that sins against God, prophanations of his Name, neglects of his Worship, abuses of sacred Things, are not destructive both of our bodies and souls. If such sinners are spared for the present, it is but in order to their more grievous and exemplary punishment. They are treasuring up wrath against the day of Wrath and

revelation

revelation of the righteous Judgment of God: Who hath decreed that proud and presumptuous sinners shall be mightily tormented; but that the merciful shall obtain mercy, the humble shall be exalted, the meek shall inherit the Earth; that he that seeketh the Lord, shall find him, that he who ordereth his conversation aright, shall obtain the salvation of God, thro' *Jesus Christ* our Lord, to whom, &c.





## SERMON LXXXIII.

*On the Twelfth Sunday after TRINITY.*

M O R N I N G.

2 KINGS x. 3 i

But *Jebe* took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of *Israel* with all his Heart: for he departed not from the Sins of *Jeroboam*, which made *Israel* to Sin.

**H**IS Chapter contains the History of a great Reformation which *Jebe* wrought in the Kingdom of *Israel*, by utterly destroying a prevalent sort of Idolatry, that had been introduced and established by the three former Kings, *Ahab* and his two Sons, to the great offence of Almighty God, and almost to the ruin and extirpation of his true Religion.

OF *Ahab* it is said, that in high contempt of the Divine Law, which severely prohibited such idolatrous Mixtures, he took to Wife *Jezebel* the Daughter of *Ethbaal*, whom other Historians call *Ithobalus*. And with her he espoused the worship of *Baal*, the common Idol of all *Phoenicia*, and formerly of all *Palestine* too, till *Joshua* and the Judges of *Israel* rooted

it out, as appears from the History of *Gideon* and other Passages.

THE short account of which Idol is this. The Pagan World, being gross of apprehension, and rather led by Sense than Reason, did chuse for their Gods, those things which were most beneficial to them. And the Eastern Countries esteeming the Sun to be the most beautiful and beneficial of all sensible Objects, they fancied it was a divine intelligent Being, the great Inspector and Governor of the World, making Day and Night, Summer and Winter, Seed-time and Harvest, and having a great influence upon all the Elements and every Creature; so that they invoked and prayed to it, and magnified it with the highest appellations their Language would afford, as *Baal-samen*, Lord of Heaven, *Moloch* and *Melchom* King of Heaven, and by other Titles, according to the difference of the *Phoenician*, *Persian*, *Arabian*, and other Eastern Languages. They built Temples and Altars, instituted Priests, offered Sacrifices, and performed all other religious Rites and Solemnities to the Sun, as to a God. Particularly they kept a Sacred Fire continually burning in honour of it, as being the fountain of Heat and Light; and had a peculiar way of dedicating their Children to it, by passing them either through the Flame, or between two distinct Hearths or Altars of this hallowed Fire; though sometimes they even burnt them to death in it by way of Sacrifice, as Holy Scripture assures us.

AND by another custom very frequent in these Countries, about *Carthage*, *Tyre*, and *Sidon*, they dignified their Kings, famous Heroes and Benefactors with the name of their God *Baal*, either singly by it self, or in composition with some other Word. Hence

*Baal*

*Baal, Bel, or Belus*, (for 'tis the same) is the name of an ancient King of Tyre. And 'tis compounded in *Ethbaal* and *Jezebel*; and in *Hannibal*, *Asdrubal*, *Adberbal*, and other *Phœnician* names which we meet with in common History; which shews how devoted they were to this Idol. And farther, such highly-esteemed Princes and Heroes, after their death, were deified and worshipped by the appellation of *Baalm*, which is the plural number of *Baal*, and which piece of Idolatry was practised in *Israel* too, as we read often in the Sacred Histories, and in the Prophets.

THIS Impiety, purged out by the former Kings and Judges, *Ahab*, instigated by the Zeal of his Wife, studied to replant. Nor was he satisfied with the bare Toleration of it, but in order to make it the only Religion of his Kingdom, he abrogated the Law of the Lord, demolished his Altars, and killed and banished and starved his Prophets, and obliged his People, who were but too forward of their own accord, to acquiesce in and conform to this Establishment. There was but one Man who durst reprove *Ahab* to his face, with that severity which his Enormities required; and that was the great Prophet *Elijah*, who was so eminent for his favour with God, and his power to call down Blessings and Judgments from Heaven, that the King, however exasperated against him, yet durst not lay hands on him to hurt him. This Prophet made a brave attempt to ruin the credit of *Baal*'s Prophets, and submitted Religion to be try'd in their own way; that since they profess'd themselves the Priests of the God of Fire, ' Let us,' says he, lay Sacrifices on our respective Altars, but ' put no fire under them, and the God that being ' called upon, sends fire to consume the Sacrifice,

‘ let him be God.’ The Sacrifices were prepared accordingly; and the event you well know; which though it was so astonishing, that it thoroughly convinced the Spectators that the truth was on *Elijah*’s side, and animated them, at his command, to stone the Idolaters, according to the Law of *Moses*, even while their King and Patron stood by; yet did it not reclaim *Ahab* from his fatal Error; nor was he reclaimed by the doom of utter destruction to him and his whole Family, which this Prophet afterwards denounced against him, from the Mouth of the Lord. So that it became necessary for the honour and justice of God, to execute, as he always does, his long-despised and ineffectual Threatnings. And to this purpose *Jehu* the Captain of *Ahab*’s Host, being an active valiant Man, was by the special direction of God to his Prophet, anointed King over *Israel*, with this express charge from God’s own Mouth, that he should utterly destroy the whole House of *Ahab*, as a just vengeance for the Blood of the Prophets and other Servants of the Lord, *Naboth*’s in particular, which he had cruelly shed.

This charge *Jehu* executed with rigour upon *Jezebel*, *Ahab*’s Relict, his Son *Jehoram*, and his Grand-children, insomuch that *Ahaziah* King of *Judah*, who was an Idolater, and a descendant of *Ahab* by the Mother’s side, was involved in the Destruction.

AND the divine Commission fully justified him, and cleared him in all this Execution. For otherwise we could not have read so deep a Tragedy, without an abhorrence of the Executioner, notwithstanding the Demerits of the Sufferers. Without this, every act of *Jehu* against the House of *Ahab* had been Treason and Murder. For the general and established

Law of God binds Subjects to a patient enduring of their Sovereign's Actions, be they of what nature they will. *Who shall stretch forth his hand against the Lord's Anointed, and be guiltless*, said David when he had *Saul* in his Power, and the greatest human reasons to dispatch him, but no Commission from above. If we look back to *1 Kings xvi.* there we find *Zimri* in all the Circumstances of *Jehu*, except the Divine Commission. He was Captain of the Chariots to *Elah*, the wicked Son and Successor of a very bad Father, *Baasha*, against whom the Word of the Lord came by the Prophet *Jehu*, (for there was a Prophet then of that Name) *that he would cut off his Posterity; and that him that died of his House in the City, the Dogs should eat; and him that died in the Field the Fowls of the Air should eat*; just the same as *Elijah* denounced against *Ahab*. Now *Zimri* being an ambitious Man, and taking, it is likely, this Prophecy for his Warrant, assassinated his Master King *Elah*, as he sate at an Entertainment in his Steward's House. Here now was a Family like *Ahab's*, devoted to utter Excision by a known Prophecy: and *Zimri* is said to have fulfilled this Prophecy by destroying them. But it no where appears, that he had any special Commission from God, to be the Instrument of this Slaughter; and therefore his Enterprize is presently branded for Treason, and seven Days after it he died shamefully and desperately. He was one of those forward Zealots, who will not wait God's time, but take his Work out of his Hands; who though they may fulfil his Judgment, yet they sin in the doing of it, as doing it irregularly, and with the Breach of several Duties from which his special Command alone could release them.

BUT here in the case before us, *Jehu* had a clear and full Authority for what he did. He was anointed King of *Israel* by immediate Revelation from God, and charged with the Execution of his Vengeance upon the House of *Abah*, and commanded to go about it immediately. This quite alter'd his Condition, and together with that his Duty. He now ow'd *Jehoram* no farther Allegiance as a Subject, nor Service and Gratitude as his Captain. For he was now the true and sole King of *Israel*, and *Jehoram*'s Regal authority was wholly abrogated; the Sword was properly in *Jehu*'s hand, and he had Power to use it against *Jehoram* and every body else, according as he should receive Orders from God, the supremest Legislator of all the World.

FOR God indeed may make what Exceptions he pleases from his own general Laws. And it is as just for him to cut off Sinners by the Sword, as by a natural Death. But because the Sword cannot act, but as it is apply'd by the Hands of Men, who are accountable to God for the Use of it; therefore they must never use it contrary to his known and general Laws, except they have a special Revelation from him to direct them otherwise: Which I think is not pretended to in these latter Days by the sober and serious part of Mankind; tho' it was common in *Israel*, who, notwithstanding their Kings, lived always under a Theocracy, or immediate Direction of God by his Prophets in special Cases; who by virtue thereof made what Revolutions and extraordinary Changes of Government he saw fit: Of which, this before us was certainly of his making. For as he first directed it, so when it was accomplished, he gives *Jehu* an ample Commendation for what he had done, and promises

promises him, that for this very Service his Family should reign to the fourth Generation.

THIS they did in fact, and might have reigned much longer, if this new Royal Family had not continued a gross Corruption in that Religion which they were raised up to reform. What that was, my Text informs us. *Jehu took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of Israel with all his Heart; for he departed not from the Sins of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin.*

THIS makes no small Abatement to that Praise which we were ready to give this Prince before, who had so bravely signalized his Zeal, both by Word and Deed, for the Honour of God against the Priests of *Baal*, whom he cut to pieces, and turned their Temple into a Dunghill, and rooted that Idolatry out of the Kingdom for ever. Why could not so active a Reformer have compleated his work, by correcting the Sin of *Jeroboam*, so often branded and detested? The reason why he did not do this, we shall understand presently, when we have seen what this Sin was, and the Motives and Temptations to it.

W H E N thro' the just Wrath of God for the Idolatries of King *Solomon*, the Ten Tribes of *Israel* revolted from his Son, and made *Jeroboam* their King; this new Prince consider'd, that if, according to Law and constant Custom, *Israel* should go up to *Jerusalem* to sacrifice in the Temple, the Magnificence of that holy Place, the remembrance that it was lately built by their famous King *Solomon*, and the sight they would there have of his Son and Successor, might make their Hearts relent, and bring them to re-unite again with *Judah*, to *Jeroboam's* utter Destruction; therefore he resolved at any rate to

keep his People far enough from *Jerusalem*; and having advised with his Politicians, he caused two golden Calves to be cast, and put them in two Temples which he built, the one in *Bethel*, the southern Border, and the other in *Dan*, the most northern part of *Israel*; and then calling the chief of the People together, he told them (in the Language of all Schismaticks) that God is in all Places, and hears and respects all Men every where alike, who serve him with a true Heart and sincere Affection: That it was too laborious and chargeable, as well as dangerous, for them to go to perform their Devotions at *Jerusalem*, a City now at Enmity with them: That for their Ease and Safety he had provided two Temples in their opposite Coasts, that People might resort for Worship to that which was nearest to their Habitations: And that for their Priesthood, they would be no longer confined to the Tribe of *Levi*, but Men of every Tribe should be capable of it, and so the Advantage would be the more common and universal; and Religion upon as good a foot in *Israel* as it was in *Judah*.

B U T whence came *Jeroboam* to establish his Schism, with the making of two Calves? Why should he think his Temples the more sacred and inviting to the Worshippers, for the Presence of such Figures in them?

S O M E learned Men will needs have these to be made in Imitation of that which *Aaron* cast for the People, out of their golden Ear-rings, in the Wilderness of *Sinai*.

B U T it is incredible that this new King and his Counsellors, however abandon'd in other respects, should avowedly imitate and copy after that Piece, which

which was known to have cost their Ancestors so very dear, and for which they still did Penance every Year, by a solemn Fast kept up among them. If they explain'd the Reason of their Calves, they would not sure give such a reason for them.

IT is extreamly improbable that he should intend flat Idolatry by these Figures, since he well knew, and God's Prophet had assured him, when he rent his Mantle in twelve Pieces, and gave him ten, that it was for the Idolatries of *Solomon*, that ten Tribes were rent from the House of *David*, and given to him.

HIS Intention therefore was, to continue the establish'd Religion, as to the Substance of it, and to alter such Circumstances in the Temple-Worship and Priesthood as he apprehended would be of dangerous Consequence to his Government. For his Head was now full of his new Kingdom, and how to settle it in his Family, and his Business with Religion was only to accommodate it to this End; which could affect him only in the two Particulars aforesaid.

AND because there were sundry Figures of Creatures in *Solomon's Temple*, and particularly twelve Oxen that supported a great brazen Laver: he held it both lawful and expedient to place some significant Figure in his new Temples: and he chose that of the Calves for two Ends.

ONE was, because it was a proper Emblem of a Sacrifice: So that when his Temples and Calves were dedicated together, he might say to the People; 'Now here is as much of the Divine Presence and Residence as at *Jerusalem*; and it is as lawful for *Israel* to offer Sacrifice here, as it is for *Judah* to do it there.' So those Words of his, *These be thy Gods, O Israel*, are commented

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ed upon. For no body imagines he meant to persuade them, that these Figures of the Calves were Deities; but that the Divine Majesty, upon their being consecrated to him, was as present and as ready to bless *Israel* there, as he was the Worshippers in *Solomon's Temple*. As to the Word *Gods*, being in the plural number, it is commonly so in the sacred Language, when meant of no more than the one God.

HIS other End in setting up these Figures might be, to make the Breach between the two Kingdoms irreconcileable. For though he might recommend them to his own People, yet he cared not how offensive they were to *Judah*. And herein he gained his End; for they had their Brethren in perpetual Detestation upon this account.

AND no less odious was *Israel* to God for it. For however they pleaded their good Intentions, and Freedom from Idolatry, in what they did; yet here was a horrible Schism made in the Church of God; and together with that, many of his sacred Laws were presumptuously violated and trampled upon. His most solemn Prohibitions to build Altars, and offer Sacrifices any where but in the Temple at *Jerusalem*; His Injunctions to all *Israel* to appear there annually at the three great Festivals; His Limitations of the Priesthood to the House of *Aaron*, and other Sacred Ministrations to the Tribe of *Levi*, were all utterly sunk and cancelled.

NOW *Jehu* departed not from these Sins of *Jeroboam*, to wit, the golden Calves in *Bethel* and in *Dan*. We now see the Reason why he departed not from them; the very same which induced his Predecessor *Jeroboam* to set them up; lest the People going up

to *Jerusalem* to worship, should think of reconciling themselves to their former Sovereigns of the House of *David*. *Jehu* could be very religious, so far as it suited with human Policy. He could let loose all his Fury upon the Worshippers of *Baal*, and the House of *Ahab*, and called out to his Friends to bear witness of his Zeal for the Lord, while he was about this Work. Why? Because he was doing his own Work at the same time, and confirming his own Royalty by the Destruction of his great Enemies and Competitors. But to think of healing the old inveterate Schism in Religion, and restore the Laws relating to the Priesthood and Temple-worship, was to run a risque which none of his Predecessors would venture upon, since the Division of the two Kingdoms. It is true, God had promised to establish that King in *Israel*, whosoever he were, that should keep his Statutes and Commandments as *David* had done; but *Jehu* had not Faith to believe him, notwithstanding the great things he had done for him: God's Displeasure against *Jeroboam*'s Schismatical Priests and Altars was notorious, but *Jehu* hoped to atone for that, by an over-flowing Zeal against *Baal*: Him he was resolved to extirpate, cost what it would; and that Task should be his excuse for not correcting the other Enormity.

THUS *Jehu* went but half way in his Reformation, and his Religion was but human Policy in the bottom: He was more careful of his own Interests than God's Honour, and his great Zeal ended in Self-love.

HOW much better a Reformer was *Hezekiah* in his Kingdom of *Judah*, who not only abolished Idolatry, but Schism too, by suppressing those High-

places

places we read of, which the People had set up as so many private Altars, to offer part at least of their Sacrifices in, and that in prejudice to the Priests, and in derogation to the Temple and Altar at *Jerusalem*. And this he did at a time when he had dangerous Enemies of the *Affyrians* and *Philistines*, and when it might be thought very unseasonable and unpolitick to give any disgust to his own People. But this Prince was no Secular Politician, but indeed a much wiser man; for he trusted God farther than any of his Predecessors, since the division of the two Kingdoms. And the wisdom of this trust was fully justified, by those continued Successes and miraculous Deliverances which God vouchsafed him. And therefore from the whole we may conclude, that it is our truest Policy and Interest to be thorough and impartial Servants of God; to obey him in his own sense and way, without reserve; and not to be tempted by any by-respects and present considerations to deal deceitfully with him; but pursue our Duty steddyly through all difficulties and apparent hazards, till we come to the issue of it, which cannot fail to be happy. For however we may flatter ourselves that we are no Idolaters, because we do not allow of Image-worship, but are rather zealous against it; yet if we sacrifice any Command of God to any Imagination, any secular Interest or Honour, any love or fear of Men, they are our Idols and our Gods, as effectually as if we had so many Images before us.

HOW many *Jebus*'s have we known and heard of among ourselves, violent for some things in Religion which have promoted rheir Affairs, and meer Liberties in all the rest? who while they have abhorred Idols, have run with a flaming Zeal to the commission

of Sacrilege, and have made no scruple, or rather have pleaded Conscience for perverting the plain genuine Sense of as many passages of God's word, as have been urged against them, and opposed at any time to their evil ways.

WHAT reward can such men hope for, who use Religion for such a cloak of Hypocrisie, and while with *Jehu* they make Ostentation of Zeal for God, sit down with him in the known and avowed breach of his most sacred Laws? They may possibly be as successful as he was, in gaining some temporal Advantages by such a Conduct; but from his Example they have no Encouragement to hope for God's Blessing along with them. On the contrary, they will find that his most meritorious Service, which he is applauded for in this chapter, is afterwards put to the Account of his Sins, and threatned with the Divine Vengeance. *I will*, says God by the Prophet *Hosea*, chap. i. ver. 4. *I will avenge the Blood of Jezreel upon the House of Jehu*. Which at first hearing must sound strangely: For will God punish him for the execution of his own decree, which was so expressly put into his hands to accomplish? Where is the Justice of this? I answer, it is very just: for *Jehu* by his subsequent Actions plainly shewed, that in all this execution he studied rather to please himself, than to serve and gloriifie God: and therefore it was very fit that he should bear the load of that Guilt, which nothing but an express Revelation could discharge him of, as I noted before, since he had so very little regard to the Will of God in this extraordinary Dispensation. This shows how the leaven of Self-love and partial Obedience will corrupt the whole lump of otherwise great and good Services.

LET us then, in conclusion, be persuaded that it is our truest interest to serve God in his own way, with a perfect and upright Heart; not keeping one Commandment and breaking another, just as it suits with our present Affections or Conditions, but rendering a due and impartial Obedience to all the Divine Laws; so shall we not be sent away with the transitory Rewards of *Jehu*, and of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, a blaze of secular Glory, Riches and Honours; but being found faithful to the whole Will of our Lord, shall be admitted into that everlasting Joy which he hath prepared for us, through his Merits, who there liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c.





# SERMON LXXXIV.

*On the Twelfth Sunday after TRINITY.*

E V E N I N G .

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2 KINGS xviii. 4.

*He removed the high places, and brake the images and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nebushtan.*



E lately heard how *Jehoshaphat* King of *Judah* married *Joram* his son and heir to *Athaliah* the daughter of *Ahab* King of *Israel*, and by that alliance opened a door for the admission of *Jezebel's* Idolatry into his Kingdom. And quickly was *Baal* exalted in *Judah*, and became the Idol of *Joram* the husband, and *Abaziah* the son of this marriage. Some short check was given to the progress of this Idolatry in the reign of *Joash*, the third in succession, who coming to the Crown at seven years old, was under the tuition of *Jeboiada* the High-priest, who had married his aunt, and being a man of courage and zeal for the true Religion, kept

kept up the practice of it for several years according to the divine Law; and *Joash*, having been educated by him, followed his instructions, and reigned well all the days of *Jeboiada*. But when he was dead, the Princes of *Judah* got free access to the King, and corrupted him so, that he forsook the house of God, and served groves and idols. Then the Spirit of God came upon *Zechariah* the son of *Jeboiada*, and his successor in the Priests office, who expostulated with them, saying, *Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, to cause him to forsake you, and deliver you up to your enemies?* But they fell upon him at the King's commandment, and stoned him to death in the court of the Lord's House. To revenge whose death, God sent an army of *Syrians* upon *Judah* and *Jerusalem*, who destroyed the Princes, and reduced *Joash* to such a miserable condition, that his own servants conspired against him and slew him: And his son *Amaziah* reigned in his stead. This son, like the father, begun well, and ended ill, and came to the like untimely death, by the hands of his own people. *Uzziah* his son was a King of much the same character. *Jotham*, the next in order, is said to have done well, but it could be but in some particulars: It is a great abatement to his goodness, that he entred not into the Temple of the Lord, and that his people followed their old evil ways. As for *Abaz*, his son and successor, he was so far from doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord, that he walked in the idolatrous ways of the Kings of *Israel*, and made molten images for *Baalim*. He also burnt incense in the valley of the son of *Hinnom*, and made his children pass through the fire, after the abominations of the Heathen, and sacrificed in the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

AND

AND he still did more wickedly; for when God raised up the *Syrians* against him to scourge him, even then he sacrificed unto the Gods of *Damascus* which smote him: And said, *Because the Gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me.* For which purpose I suppose it was, that he took a pattern of an altar at *Damascus*, and ordered one to be built at *Jerusalem* after the same form, upon which he offered all kind of sacrifices.

NOW after such a race of Kings as we have here seen, of which the best were but negligent observers of God's Law, and the worst extremely bad, it must needs affect every pious heart with joy and wonder, to see such a King as *Hezekiah* rise up like a glorious Sun after a long season of Clouds and Darkness; that coming of such degenerate Ancestors, and especially of such an idolatrous Father, he should presently reform the Church and State of *Judah* so exactly, as if *David* himself had been returned from the other world, and were again upon the throne: That he should have zeal and courage enough to remove the high places, to break the images, to cut down the groves, and to demolish the brazen serpent which the children of *Israel* had long idolized, by burning incense to it. The reformation of so many practices, which tho' corrupt in themselves, yet by length of time had got the face of religious Duties, was no easy matter to bring about. Some of them were as old as the reign of King *Solomon*, who after he had done gloriously in building a Temple to the God of his Fathers, fullied his religious character by building high places, in compliment to his wives, to the false Deities of *Moab* and *Ammon*. And tho' *Asa* his great grandson endeavoured to reduce Religion to the condition it was in in *David's*

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time, and destroyed all the Idols of his father and his mother, yet the high places were not removed; but the people offered sacrifice and burnt incense in them, during his and his son *Jehoshaphat's* reign; so that the praise of suppressing these high places was reserved for *Hezekiah*; none of those I have reckoned up, which went before him, ever did this, or so much as attempted it, that I read of.

AS for these high places, I believe that in some reigns they were used only for the exercise of the true Religion. But that even so they were abused to illegal practices, is evident from what we read in the account of them, that the people sacrificed and burnt incense in them, which they should not have done any where but on the altar in *Jerusalem*. For thus their Law enjoined them, *Deut. xii.* utterly to destroy all the places wherein the old inhabitants had served their Gods, upon the high mountains, upon the hills, and under every green tree: to overthrow their altars, break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; to cut down the graven images of their Gods, and destroy the names of them out of their places. *But*, says he, *unto the place which the Lord your God shall chuse out of all the Tribes, to put his name there, even to his habitation shall ye seek, and thither shall ye come: and thither shall ye bring your burnt-offerings and sacrifices, and tythes, and beave-offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your free-will-offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks.*

YOU see how strictly their Law enjoined them to offer all their sacrifices at *Jerusalem*; and this injunction is repeated and earnestly inculcated. So that it was not enough for them to say, they sacrificed to none but the true God in the high places; for they

were

were not allowed to sacrifice there upon any account whatever: I mean, in the Kingdom of *Judah*, where the people had free liberty to go up to *Jerusalem*. I confess, in *Israel*, where they were deprived of this liberty by *Jeroboam* and his Successors, God seems to have dispensed with this Law, and to have been pleased with Sacrifices offered in such high places, as were dedicated to his worship only. For which reason idolatrous Kings destroyed those places; which gave occasion to that complaint of the Prophet *Elijah*, that they had thrown down God's altars, meaning such altars as these; for they had not, they could not meddle with that at *Jerusalem*. But *Hezekiah* is praised for destroying the high places of *Judah*; and it is noted as an abatement of the character of some of his predecessors, that tho' in other respects they governed according to God's Law, yet they suffered these high places to stand, and the people to sacrifice in them; *Hezekiah* therefore excelled them in this, that he removed them.

THERE was great reason, no doubt, why God prohibited his people to sacrifice in them. One was, because they were so extreme prone to idolatry. And he foresaw they would abuse these places, as afterwards they did, and as *Ezekiel* complains, vi. 13. that *they placed their idols round about their altars, upon every high hill, in all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree, and under every thick oak, where they offered sweet savours to all their idols*. I confess they did not always commit these provocations in such places; but the temptations and opportunities to commit them were always the same; which made it reasonable that they should be wholly forbid them.

Secondly, IN such places, tho' they were right in the object of their worship, yet they might be guilty of many ill practices in the form and manner of it. They might offer fewer sacrifices, and less perfect in their kind, than the Law required. They might rob God and his Priests of those portions which were peculiarly appropriated to them. Whereas at *Jerusalem* these things were publickly and carefully looked into, so that there was not room for those frauds which might pass unobserved in private places. *Lastly*, I doubt not but one great end which God had in obliging his people to sacrifice at *Jerusalem*, was, that he might preserve an Uniformity of worship in his Church, that his people might not set up altar against altar, and thence grow into emulations and contentions about their Religion, and consequently be divided into little petty sects and factions. Of what great account this religious Unity was held in ancient times, we read in the History of the *Reubenites*, and *Gadites*, and half Tribe of *Manasseh*, related *Joshua xxii*. These people chose their inheritance out of *Canaan*, on the other side *Jordan*. And when they took possession of it, they built an altar on the bank of *Jordan*, just at the place where the *Israelites* had passed over it. When this was told to the *Israelites* in *Canaan*, they sent an embassy of the Princes of the Tribes to expostulate with these their Brethren, saying, *What trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, in building you an altar, that ye might rebel against him? If the land of your inheritance be unclean, pass over unto us, and take your portion here where the Lord's tabernacle dwells: But rebel not against our God and us, by building you an altar, beside the altar of the Lord our God.* To this the accused answered with the most solemn protestations,

That

That they had not built their altar with a design to offer any manner of sacrifice upon it; but only that it might be a witness for them in time to come, when their brethrens children might possibly challenge their children to show what right they had to be numbered with the people of the Lord, and object to them as dwelling beyond *Jordan*, that they were out of the bounds of the Lord's inheritance; therefore said the accused, We have built this altar, not for burnt-offerings nor sacrifice: but that it might be a witness between us and you, and our generations after us, that we have a right to bring our offerings before the Lord; and that if your children shall question ours about it, or offer to hinder them from sacrificing to the Lord, that then our children may plead this altar, and say, Behold the pattern of the altar of the Lord, which our fathers made, not for burnt-offerings nor sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you, that we are all the people of the same God. This is all we intend by it: God forbid that we should rebel against him, and turn from following him, to build an altar for any sacrifice, besides the altar of the Lord God that is before his tabernacle.' And with this answer the ambassadors were very well satisfied.

NOW this, as I said before, shews the mind of God, and the zeal of his People to keep up an Unity of Religion in all their Tribes. For the builders of this altar in dispute, are not accused as if hereby they intended to change the object of their worship, and to sacrifice to some other God beside the God of *Israel*: They are only questioned for erecting an altar besides that which was before the Tabernacle of the Lord, as if they intended to divide their Church, and exercise

their Religion separately from the rest of their brethren. Such a division both accusers and accused call a *rebellion against God, a turning away from following him*: And that justly, because his Law had appointed but one altar for the sacrifices of all the twelve Tribes, as I noted from *Deut. xii.* And therefore *Hezekiah* acted according to the will of God, and the truly religious Constitution of his Country, when he destroyed the altars of high places, because such religious Services were performed at them, as were by the divine Law peculiarly appropriated to the Tabernacle and Temple.

2dly, *Hezekiah* brake in pieces the images, statues, and pillars which were erected in those groves, which make it plain that at that time some of them at least were places of idolatrous worship. But which way could images find hands to make them, or places to receive them, in the Kingdom of *Judah*, where that Law of God was professed, which utterly forbad the making of them? To read of images in *Israel* can be no great surprize, especially in and after the reign of uxorious *Ahab*, who to make way for his wife's Religion, forsook the Law of God, broke down his Altars, and slew his Prophets with the sword, and constituted the Priests of *Baal* the Bishops and Fathers of his Church. But a short reflection will show us, that by an unhappy match which *Jehoshaphat* most unadvisedly made for his son and successor with a daughter of *Ahab*, the Sidonian idolatry quickly filled the high places of *Judah* with images: So that, as the Prophet *Ezekiel* complains, they were placed round about their Altars, as Deities who were to be entertained with their sacrifice. And the same Prophet, in his xxiii. chap. under the parable of *Abolah* and *Abolibah* affirms,

that

that the idolatry of *Judah* was even more gross than that of *Israel*. Only *Judah* was now and then blessed with a better King than *Israel*, whom God raised up, and inspired with a zeal against these idols, to throw them into the fire, and to restore the true order and method of divine Worship. And such a King was *Hezekiah*.

BUT besides the images of the Heathen round about, there was a piece of superstition peculiar to the *Jews*, which called aloud for the hand of a Reformer to put it out of the way; and that was *the brazen serpent*, which *Moses*, by God's direction, had made in the wilderness, to heal the people when they were stung by serpents, and which they had preserved to this time, as a standing monument of such deliverance.

WHO could have imagined that this antidote would ever have been turned into deadly poison, and this brazen serpent have stung worse than those in the wilderness? Yet so it happened, that the people at this time had taken it into the number of their Gods, and with great devotion burnt incense before it.

WHEN this practice begun, it does not appear: The words of my Text sound, as if it had been always. For *unto those days*, it is said, *the children of Israel burnt incense to it*. But we can hardly think they were known to do this in the days of *Moses*, *Joshua*, the *Judges*, or the first Kings of *Israel*. For then it had been abolished, or at least removed out of sight, long before this time. And therefore we must, with learned men, date the beginning of this from the time when other idolatries begun to prevail in *Judah*, which, as we noted above, was towards the end of *Solomon's* reign.

IN such circumstances, when the peoples hearts were set upon idols, it is easy to conceive for what reason they idolized this brazen serpent. For it being written in the Law of Moses, *Whosoever looks upon it, shall live*, they fancied that as the sight of it healed their ancestors when bitten by serpents, so there still resided a divine Virtue and Spirit in it, which would be helpful to them under other misfortunes. Certainly they were persuaded, that there was something divine contained under this figure, as appears by the words of *Hezekiah*, when he broke it in pieces, and called upon the people to view the inside well, and they would find no such extraordinary matter as they fancied in it. *This, said he, is Nebuſtan*, i. e. ‘ common brass, no other than what you have in the furniture of your houses. Why then will you so miserably cheat your selves, and dishonour your God, as to think that such figures can of themselves convey the blessings of Heaven to you, and merit your sacrifices and adorations?’ Thus *Hezekiah* convinced the Jews of their senseless idolatry in this particular. And he not only broke it to pieces, but ground it to powder, as is supposed, and scattered it amongst the dust of the Earth, that the people might not make a superstitious use of any of the fragments of it.

NOR does our Saviour’s allusion to this serpent in the Gospel, make it of any greater account to us Christians. He never intended to have it understood as a type of himself. It is more properly a figure of the Destroyer than the Saviour of mankind. He only alludes to the erection of it as a fit resemblance of his crucifixion, that as this figure was raised on high, for the healing of all that should look upon it, so Christ should be lifted up on a cross, that all men who

should

should believe him to be the *Messiah*, notwithstanding his crucifixion, should not perish by the wound given them by the old serpent in paradise, but should be healed of it so as to live for ever. In this the resemblance between them was exact and pertinent. And by this comparison our Lord gave an early and sensible intimation of what death he should die, and for what reason. This is sufficiently understood by a verbal comparison, without seeing the figure of this serpent. So that *Hezekiah* hath done us no wrong by breaking it in pieces, but hath rather prevented some superstitious Christians from idolizing this brazen serpent, as the *Jews* had done before them.

AND thus we have seen *Hezekiah*'s zeal for the glory of God, wherein he excelled all his predecessors, from King *David* to his own time, and approved himself to be a King after God's own heart, worthy to sit on the throne of *Judah*. Whose Kings were bound to be very diligent in the study of God's Law, that they might know how to govern their people by the precepts of it: According to that ordinance of *Moses* which we read *Deut. xvii.* in these words; *When the King sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, he shall transcribe a copy of the law for himself out of the book of the priests and levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, and to do them.* This was part of the coronation oath of the Kings of *Judah*; but alas, how little considered by most of them! Some of them were professed enemies of God, and others very negligent defenders of his Religion; and why were they such? because instead of giving the Book of the Law a daily perusal, they wholly neglected it, and suffered

suffered it to be thrown into holes and corners, and buried amongst lumber, as their history assures us.

BUT such was not King *Hezekiah*; he took care, according to the example of holy *David*, to know the Law of God, and to do it. *First*, he acquainted himself with the true intent and meaning of it, and then he notified his resolution to his Court and Kingdom, that they should all observe it. In which he manifested a Spirit fit to reign in difficult times. For he threw aside all the pleas and excuses which his predecessors had made, and which are too fashionable upon such occasions: *That the times would not bear a thorough reformation*: *That the King of Assyria*, whose tributaries they were, would take occasion from their religious Divisions to break in upon them, and reduce them to a Province of his Empire. *Hezekiah* did not excuse himself by such plausible arguments from doing the will of his God. No; he took care in the first place to restore the uniformity and beauty of true Religion, and then he relied upon God for the success of his secular affairs. He threw off the yoke of the King of *Assyria*, in confidence that God would support him in the liberty he asserted, because he kept his Commandments. And he took a very right method, to make his peace with God in the first place, and then not to fear what man could do against him. For his impartial obedience justly entitled him to the divine Favour and Protection. And the event answered his hopes; the forces of the *Assyrians* which invaded him, were cut off by a special hand from Heaven.

THIS is a great encouragement to the Princes and Rulers of the Earth, to seek the glory of God, and establish his Laws, in the first place, and then to depend

depend upon a happy issue of all their righteous counsels and administrations. It is, by the confession of all wise men, the best policy, and most conducive to the felicity of any Nation, for the Heads and Governors to lead their People in the ways of God's Laws, and the works of his Commandments. Which they will certainly do, if they seriously intend either their own, or their peoples welfare. For there can be no welfare without the love and favour of God; but he cannot favour those who walk contrary to his Laws. Which the people must do, if their leaders go before them in evil ways. For the leaders are the shepherds, and the people the flock; and the flock can go no other way, but as the shepherds direct them. Therefore it is the duty of every good shepherd so to watch over and order his flock, that they may keep always under the defence of the most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

AND it is a practicable duty, it may be done by every one that has a heart to it. For who could labour under greater discouragements to set about it, than *Hezekiah*? Who could have so many groves to cut down, so many idols and their altars to demolish, as he found established by long prescription, under the reigns of almost all his predecessors? But herein he acted like a King indeed; not like a Servant of men, but a Minister of God, whose will he readily performed, as soon as he was invested with power and authority to do it. He presently appointed the ax to the groves, and the hammer and mattock to the idols and their altars, and obliged all his people, notwithstanding their ancient usage and customs, to come up at the feasts prescribed by God's Law, and worship at *Jerusalem*.

HOW

HOW sweet is a zeal for the Glory of God in the Spirit of Princes ! How greatly does it add to their lustre and dignity ! giving us the brightest idea of the divine Image, and making it almost lawful to cry out with the men of *Lystra*, *Acts* xiv. *The Gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.* May the Spirits of Princes be influenced and inspired with this zeal, until the Kingdoms of this World become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and his will be done upon Earth as it is Heaven, that men may be found but little lower than the Angels here, and finally become subjects of the same immortal Kingdom, under his administration who is a greater than *Hezekiab*, or than *David* himself, even *Jesus Christ* our Lord, &c.





# SERMON LXXV.

*On the Thirteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*

M O R N I N G.

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2 K I N G S xix. 37.

*And it came to pass as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his God, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his Sons smote him with the Sword: And they escaped into the Land of Armenia; and Esarhaddon his Son reigned in his stead.*

**S**UCH was the Tragical end of a King who had prospered to his own ruin; so intoxicated with the success of his own and his Progenitors Arms, as to fancy that all the powers of Heaven and Earth were chained to his Chariot wheels. History abounds with the great Actions of the *Affyrian* Emperors. *Hezekiah*, in his Prayer to God upon this occasion, confesses that they had rendred themselves formidable, by destroying the Nations and their Lands.

TO trace them up to their fountain head, they were descended from *Affur* the Son of *Shem*, who went out from his Brethren, and built Nineveh, as we read

read *Gen. x. 11.* and from him was denominated *Affyria*, that great Country in the *East*, bounded with *Armenia*, *Media*, *Mesopotamia*, and *Babylon*; at this day called *Yerach*, and almost wholly under the Dominion of the *Turks*, which they so name from *Ereck*, one of the primitive Cities of that Country, mentioned *Gen. x. 10.*

THE City of *Nineveh*, situate on the West-side of the River *Tigris*, was the flourishing Seat of the *Affyrian* Emperors, for above thirteen Centuries, till the time of *Sardanapalus*, who proved such an effeminate Prince, that his Captains conspired against him, and the two principal Leaders in the Conspiracy, *Belesis* and *Arbaces*, divided his Dominions between them. *Belesis* had *Babylon*, *Chaldea* and *Arabia*: And *Arbaces* had *Nineveh*, *Media*, and all the rest of the divided Empire.

THIS *Arbaces* is in Sacred Writ called *Tiglath Pileser*, or *Thilgath Pilneser*, of whom we read *2 Kings xvi*, that he assisted King *Abaz* the Father of *Hezekiah* against *Rezin* King of *Syria*, and *Pekah* King of *Israel*, and that to divert *Rezin*, he laid Siege to his Metropolis *Damascus*, took it, slew the King, and carried the people Captive.

IN the next Chapter we read, how *Salmaneser*, the Son and Successor of this *Tiglath Pileser*, came up against *Samaria*, the head City of the Kingdom of *Israel*, and took it, and carried away the ten Tribes of *Israel* Captive, and dispersed them in several Cities of the *Affyrians* and *Medes*.

WHILE *Salmaneser* was engaged in the Siege of *Samaria*, *Hezekiah*, who was now upon the Throne of *Judah*, took the Opportunity to recover what had been lost from his Kingdom in the reign of his Father

*Abaz*.

*Abaz.* And when the *Affyrian* sent to him to demand the Tribute which *Abaz* had agreed to pay annually to *Tiglath Pileser* as his Patron and Defender, *Hezekiab*, not thinking himself bound to stand to such Agreement, refused to pay it any longer. The Sacred History says, *He rebelled against the King of Assyria, and served him not.* Though the word *rebellion* be now generally taken in an ill sense, for a seditious insurrection and fighting against lawful Governors, yet our Translators did not design it should be so taken in this place, but only to denote that this good King would no longer acknowledge himself to be a tributary and dependent of the King of *Affyria*, which is all the Rebellion that is here meant, as is sufficiently explained.

THE reason why he disown'd his dependence upon the *Affyrian* was, *because he trusted in the Lord his God.* He had reformed those abuses and corruptions in Religion which prevailed in his Father's reign, and which by the just Judgment of God, had subjected him to a Foreign Yoke. He removed the High places, cut down the Groves, brake in pieces idolatrous Images, and particularly that of the Brazen Serpent, because the People treated it with a religious regard, by offering Incense to it. In all things he conformed to the *Mosaick Law*, and kept all God's Commandments as therein delivered. And consequently he had the best ground in the World to depend upon God for his Protector, who had made many express and gracious Promises to his People *Israel*, that when they kept his Statutes and his Judgments which he commanded them, he would deliver them from all their Enemies round about. The truth of these Promises they had often experienced, and

and seen their Folly in trusting men rather than God.

AT present *Hezekiah* was safe from the resentments of *Salmaneser*, whose Arms were providentially restrained from *Judah*, by a War which broke out at this time between the *Affyrians* and the King of *Tyre*. But when *Salmaneser* was dead, and his Son *Sennacherib* succeeded him, he renewed the demand upon *Hezekiah*, for the Tribute which *Abaz* had paid to his Grand-Father *Tiglath Pileser*; and upon *Hezekiah*'s refusing to pay it, he denounced War against him, and marched with a great Army into *Judea* to fall upon him.

NOW when *Hezekiah* saw that *Sennacherib* had brought a great Army into his Coasts, and begun to take his fenced Cities, he advised with his Council what was best to be done, in case the *Affyrians* should advance so far as to lay Siege to *Jerusalem*.

AND first they resolved to stop up the Fountains and Brooks that were in the Fields, that they might distress them with want of Water. In the next place they repaired the City-walls where they were broken, and erected a new outer wall for greater safe-guard. The King also provided Darts and Shields in abundance, and appointed Captains over the People to exercise them, and gathered them together before him in the street of the gate of the City, and spake comfortably to them, saying, *Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the King of Affyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him; for there be more with us than with him. With him is an Arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our Battels. And the People rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah.* 2 Chron. xxxii.

SENNA-

SENNACHERIB being informed how the Citizens of *Jerusalem* were preparing to receive him, and considering what a hard task it would be to take such a strong and populous City, grew inclinable to hearken to terms of Accommodation, and quickly received such Proposals from *Hezekiah* as were satisfactory to him. Which were, to pay him at present three hundred Talents of Silver, and thirty Talents of Gold, amounting in all to near three hundred and fifty thousand Pounds of our money, and to make punctual payment of the Tribute demanded for the future. This composition, I suppose, *Hezekiah* did not make of his own will, but at the instance of his People. For to raise the Sum presently to be paid, he was forced to cut off a great deal of Gold from the Doors and Pillars of the Temple; which was indeed better than to suffer it to fall into the Enemies hands; though I believe, if he had been left to himself, and not overpersuaded by his Counsellors, he would have trusted God for his Deliverance, without taking this extraordinary method for it. And I doubt not but when the War was ended, he restored what he had thus borrowed to purchase his Peace, though he was cheated in his Bargain.

FOR *Sennacherib* having received the money he demanded, made an expedition into *Egypt*, mentioned by *Herodotus* and others, as well as our Sacred Writer: where being baffled at the Siege of *Pelusium*, the entrance into *Egypt*, and otherwise weakened; (*Herodotus* says, that the Bow-strings and Quivers of his Archers and Shields of his Soldiers were all gnaw'd to pieces in one night, by a miraculous Army of Rats and Mice;) returning into *Palestine*, he renewed his quarrel with *Hezekiah*,

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upon pretence that he was a Confederate with the  
King of *Egypt*.

TO upbraid him with this, and to defie him in the face of his own People, he sent three of his chief Officers to *Jerusalem*, to make an Oration to the People against their King, which was pronounced by *Rabshakeb*, because he understood the *Hebrew* tongue; for which reason some of the *Jewish* Rabbies have fancied that he was a *Renegado Jew*, that had fled from his Country, and embraced both the Religion and Service of the *Affyrians*. But if the Speech which he spoke on this Occasion, was of his own composing, he betrays much ignorance in the Jewish Religion, when he charges *Hezekiah* with Impiety, for destroying the High Places, and Altars erected in them, and obliging all the *Jews* to come and offer their Sacrifices at *Jerusalem*. For this act of his was strictly agreeable to the divine Law, and a height of zeal for the worship of God, to which few Kings besides himself arrived. It being observed in the lives of otherwise good Kings, as an Alloy of their religious Character, that the High Places were not taken away in their Reigns. And therefore it was a great slander in *Rabshakeb* to say, as he does in effect, that *Hezekiah* had sinned against God, by destroying the Altars of the High Places, and obliging Men to come and offer their Sacrifices at *Jerusalem*; since in all this he was strictly conformable to the divine Command.

ANOTHER great fault of this Speaker was, his pretending a Commission given him by Revelation from God, to go and besiege *Jerusalem*. *Am I come up*, says he, *without the Lord against this place?* *the Lord said unto me, Go up against this Land and de-*

stroy it. The Lord might say thus to the *Affyrian* that went up and destroyed *Samaria*, as he did afterwards to the *Babylonian*, when he sent him against this very Place; but he could not say so to *Sennacherib* upon the occasion of this Expedition, because he says the very contrary by *Isaiah*, *That he should not shoot an arrow against it*; and the event proved this to be a true Prophecy; but the Oracles of God cannot contradict one another: Therefore that which *Rabshakeh* pretends here, is a meer Fiction.

3dly, *RABSHAKEH*'s Instructions afterwards clash, and are inconsistent with what he says here: For what need was there to plead the authority of the God of *Israel* for this Undertaking, when afterwards he challenges even this God to defeat him, making no more account of him, than of the Gods of the Gentiles. *Where are they*, says he, *that should have defended the Countries which my Master has conquered?* and *who is your Lord, that he should deliver your Jerusalem out of my hands?* His Master's Letter which he sent to *Hezekiah*, is full of the same Blasphemy. *Let not thy God, says he, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the King of Affyria.* And then he recounts his triumphs over the Gods of the Heathen, as his Servant had done; as if all Gods were alike, and *Sennacherib* were above them all.

THIS quickly came to the tryal. But first God sends this infatuated Man a Message, to let him know both what he had done by him, and what he would do with him. *I have, says he, so ordained and brought it to pass, that thou shouldst be a scourge in my hand, to lay fenced Cities into ruinous heaps. And this my pleasure was the cause of all thy Victories, and the only rea-*

son why the inhabitants of the conquered places were not able to resist thee, but were dismayed and confounded, and became as the grass of the Field, and as the green Herb; or even as vile and useless as grass upon the house-tops, and as Corn blasted before it is grown up. But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.

ALL this was executed upon Sennacherib before he was able to perform any action against Jerusalem. In that night, says the Text, the Angel of the Lord smote the Camp of the Assyrians. The same Night, say some, that Hezekiah received Sennacherib's blasphemous Letter: The Talmudists say, it was the same Night that the Army of the Assyrians sate down before Jerusalem, but were so weary that they could for the present attempt nothing against it. This is very probable, and both these Interpreters may well be understood of one and the same time.

THE Angel of the Lord smote them, with a pestilential Disease, says Josephus; with Lightning, say the Talmudists; with a hot Wind, say others, which is very frequent in those Parts, and often destroys Multitudes in a Moment. Any of these ways suit well with God's Threatning, that he would send a blast upon them, and make them as withered Grass or blasted Corn. But who among them was left to tell how they felt the Destruction? There is no need of knowing it, or guessing at it. I doubt not but it was purely miraculous, that God might the more illustrate his Power, by the unaccountableness of this slaughter.

SENNACHERIB, I take it for granted, was not present in the Army which was thus destroyed. It was headed by *Rabshakeh* and the other two Officers. And their Master was upon the Road from *Libnah* with Forces, in order to joyn them. But when he heard of the Hand of God upon his Army at *Jerusalem*, he turned in Amazement, and made the best of his way home to *Nineveh*. This agrees well with the Texts which say, *He shall not come before this City, but shall hear a rumour, and shall return into his own Land, and I will cause him to fall by the Sword in his own Land.*

GOD had reserved him for a more remarkable and bloody Death. The loss of his Army weakened him so, that he fell into contempt among his Subjects. Several of his Provinces revolted from him, particularly *Media*, which was the largest and most considerable of them all. For the *Medes*, when they heard in how low a Condition he was returned to *Nineveh*, immediately shook off his Yoke, and formed themselves into a kind of popular Government or Commonwealth. But soon growing sick of the confusions which this caused among them, they were forced to have recourse to Monarchy for the Remedy, and the next Year they chose *Deioces* for their King, whom they had formerly made great use of, as a happy arbitrator of their differences; and for the great proof which he had given of his justice and abilities on such Occasions, they advanced him to this Dignity.

SENNACHERIB was not only grown contemptible to his Subjects, but odious and intolerable to his own Family; for, like a disappointed Tyrant, he vented his savage Humours upon all that came in his way. This his ferocity was probably the motive

which bred in two of his Sons such a Rancour against him, that they conspired his Death; which they executed at a time and place when they might be least suspected of him, and in least danger from his Guards; falling upon him with their Swords in his own Chapel, as he was at his Devotions. The unnatural Assassines made their escape into *Armenia*, which is all that we know of them, but may justly suppose that they received the reward of their Parricide. His Son *Ezrabbaddon*, who succeeded him, reigned with great Felicity thirty nine Years, and added *Babylon* and its territory to his Dominions.

SOME Interpreters there are, who think the reason why *Sennacherib*'s Sons slew him, was, because in his distress he had vowed to offer them up in Sacrifice to his God. And though there appear not any ancient History to assure us of this, yet we must confess it is a very plausible Conjecture. For it was the well-known persuasion of many People, that when they were in imminent danger, the last remedy they had to extricate themselves, was to vow, and sometimes presently to offer up the dearest thing that they had in Sacrifice to their Gods. I shall mention but one Example, which is in the third Chapter of this second Book of Kings; where we are told, that when the three Kings, of *Judah*, *Israel*, and *Edom* besieged the King of *Moab* with their united Forces in his capital City, and he saw they were too hard for him, *he took his eldest Son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him up for a Burnt-Offering upon the Wall*; which affected the Besiegers with so much horror, that they raised the Siege and left him.

NOW to draw to a Conclusion; The Moral of all this History is pointed out to us, by that most ancient

ancient Greek Historian *Herodotus*, who had travelled in *Egypt*, and had carefully observed the Curiosities of it. He tells us, that in one of their Temples, he was shown the Figure of their King *Sethon*, who reigned over the *Egyptians* when this very *Sennacherib* invaded them, and was disappointed by a prodigious Multitude of Rats and Mice, which spoiled his Arms, as is noted before. In memory of this Prodigy, and miraculous Deliverance, King *Sethon*'s Statue holds a Mouse in his Hand, with this Inscription, *Let every one that looks on me, learn to fear God.* We may well take the hint, and say, Let every proud, insolent, blaspheming Wretch, who has used his Mouth to pour out horrid Blasphemies against Heaven, look upon *Sennacherib*, and learn to humble himself with the lowest Penitence and Meekness, before that Omnipotent Power, who is thus able to abase the loftiest of the Sons of Men, who shall presume to exalt and magnify themselves against him. God has declared in a very emphatical Manner, that of all sorts of Sinners he beholds the Proud with a peculiar Indignation and Aversion. And such proud Men are all those who profanely curse and swear, and treat the Deity and sacred Things with irreverent Language. Such proud Men are they, who being often reproved, harden their Hearts, hear the Divine Threatnings without receiving due Impressions from them, reject the Laws of God to follow their own Lusts, and do that which is good in their own Eyes. Such proud Men are they, who being considerable in this World, demean themselves as if they were above the Worship of God, and endeavour to persuade or terrifie others, by the Influence which they have over them, to depart from some Duty of Piety or Virtue, out of respect to them: and so to serve and please

them rather than God. Methinks I hear them vaunting in *Sennacherib's* Language, how dearly they will make those repent of it, who refuse to pay them this Homage. Such proud Men are those, whether Civil or Military, who depend upon their Arms, their Numbers, their Wealth, their Skill, or any kind of Creature, more than upon their Creator: and are not careful to see that their Undertakings be pleasing to God, and to engage his Assistance and Blessing in the first Place. *Let such look upon Sennacherib, and learn to fear God.* For they are in the same way of destruction with him, and though it may not overtake them in this World, it is reserved for them in the next: For God beholdeth the Proud afar off; he will never suffer them to dwell in his Presence.

LASTLY, Let haughty and insolent Men take notice, that as they treat God and Man, so they shall generally be treated by their own Families. This outrageous Blasphemer was horribly outraged by his own Children. And I believe, if I should lay it down as a general Rule, that those who neither fear God, nor regard Man, are not heartily loved nor regarded, even by their nearest Relatives, I do not think there would be found many Exceptions to it. So far as my own Observation reaches, I have seen, that Children have no Reverence nor true Value for those Parents, who are of a proud, atheistical Spirit, but serve them as they serve God, *i. e.* care not for any Communion with them: and are glad of their absence, even out of the World, that they may enjoy themselves the better. Indeed it is very necessary it should be so; it is a great Argument that there is a God, that the World is governed by his Providence, that he is continually making good his own sacred Rule, *Those that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me, shall be lightly regarded.*

THUS

THUS the atheistical Sennacherib teaches us Piety and Humility, by his dreadful Example. Let us prove such happy Scholars, as to go and act as contrary to him as we possibly can. Let us see the God that judgeth in the Earth, and fear, and do no more so wickedly. Let not the Voice of Blasphemy be heard amongst us: but let us remember, that a Pagan King hath decreed and enacted a Law to be observed throughout his Dominions, *Dan. vi. 26.* that *Men tremble and fear before the God of Israel, for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever: his Kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his Dominion shall be even unto the End.* To him be ascribed all Honour, &c.





# SERMON LXXVI.

*On the Thirteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*

E V E N I N G.

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2 K I N G S xxiii. 25.

*And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses, neither after him arose there any like him.*

**W**E have here the character of *Josiah* King of *Judah*, summed up in few words, but they are very significant and much to his praise, for they give him the preference above all the Kings that went before him, or that came after him. To justify this preference, and make out the reasons of it, let us see the account of the life and actions of this King, as they are related here, and in the parallel Chapters of the second Book of *Chronicles*.

BUT first I must observe, that this King was prophesied of, and promised by name, above three hundred years before he was born; at the beginning of the reign of *Jeroboam* the First, who as he was sacrificing

ficing upon his new illegal altar in *Bethel*, a Prophet of *Judah* came suddenly upon him, and cryed out against his altar in the word of the Lord, saying, *O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord, Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places, and mens bones shall be burnt upon thee,* 1 Kings xiii.

NOW we don't find that any other of the Kings of *Judah* was ever called by this name; and we may safely affirm, that his father *Amon* would never give him this name in order to fulfil this prophecy, he being even worse than *Jeroboam* himself. So that we must ascribe it to the [meer] providence of God, that so good a man was born of so bad a father, and was called by the name which had been given him so many ages before; and this without any thought or design of his parents to fulfil the sacred Oracle. This is an undeniable argument of the truth of God's word, and that he interposes his omnipotent Power in controuling and ordering of human affairs.

AND was not *Josiah*'s education as wonderful as his disposition, and the divine Favour and Assistance plainly with him at his first appearing upon the throne? For he was but eight years old when he began to reign, and how corrupt was his Court, how distracted the affairs of his Kingdom? His father *Amon*, a gross idolater, was murdered in his palace by his own servants, not upon the account of his idolatry, for in this the Conspirators differed not from him; but by the just Judgment of God, whose Law he had forsaken, and by whom he was abandoned to this outrage.

THIS however provoked the people to rise, and put the Conspirators to death. So that the young King seemed like an infant exposed upon a troublesome

sea. And yet so powerful was the grace of God in him, that in a few years he made it appear, that he was resolved to govern by the Law of God, and the example of the best of Kings. For thus we read *2 Chron. xxxiv.* that in the eighth year of his reign, and sixteenth of his age, when first he took the reins of Government into his own hands, he made publick profession of the true Religion, and chose the pattern of *David's* government for his imitation.

IN the twelfth year of his reign, and twentieth of his age, when he had reformed his own Court and Council, he began to purge *Jerusalem* and the whole Kingdom from the high places, and groves, and images, which abounded in them. And it is the more commendable in him, that he set about this regulation of sacred Things, without being warned or excited to it by any Prophet that we know of. For *Jeremias*, who was afterwards an eminent Prophet in this reign, did not begin to prophesy till the next year, as we read *Jer. i. 2.*

*JOSIAH* went a progress, or visitation, as we may call it, thro' *Jerusalem* and *Judah*, for the very best of purposes, to demonstrate his zeal for the Glory of God, and to see with his own eyes, that the altars of Idols and their Images were demolished, and their groves cut down, and the bones of idolatrous Priests dug up and burnt.

AND he did the same in the Cities of *Manasseh*, and *Epbraim*, and *Simeon*, even unto *Naphthali*, i. e. he carried his reformation out of his own Kingdom of *Judah* into *Israel*; which shews that he had a jurisdiction among the ten Tribes; as likewise had several of his predecessors. For first of all it is said, *2 Chron. xv.* that King *Asa* put away the abominable idols out

of the Cities which he had taken from mount *Ephraim*: And that there joined in covenant with him abundance of People out of *Ephraim* and *Manasseh* and *Simeon*, when they saw that the Lord was with him. Whence we may conclude, that he gained some Cities by conquest from the King of *Israel*, and some others voluntarily put themselves under his Government. 2dly, We read 2 Chron. xxx. that *Hezekiah* summoned all *Israel* to come and keep the Passover at the house of the Lord in *Jerusalem*. And he dispatched posts to them with letters to this effect: Ye children of *Israel*, turn again to the Lord God of your fathers, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hands of the King of *Affyria*. And be not like your fathers and brethren, who, for trespassing against God, were given up to desolation, as ye see. Be not ye stiff-necked like them; but yield your selves unto the Lord, and enter into his Sanctuary which he has sanctified for ever; and serve him, that the fierceness of his wrath may be turned away from you. For if ye turn again to the Lord, your brethren and children shall find compassion before them that led them captive, so that they shall come again into this Land.'

By these expressions it plainly appears, that *Hezekiah* summoned to the Passover at *Jerusalem* such *Israelites* as were left in their Cities by *Salmanasseh* King of *Affyria*, when he carried away the ten Tribes into captivity; and that the *Affyrians* had not so conquered the Kingdom of *Israel*, but that the Kings of *Judah* had the same jurisdiction in certain Cities of the ten Tribes, as they had before in the days of *Asa*. And this right was continued to the days of *Josiah*, which was the reason of his carrying his reformation thither:

Which

Which when he had accomplished, he returned to *Jerusalem*.

WHILE *Josiah* was employed in destroying the high places and monuments of Idolatry, he took care to promote a collection of money for cleansing and repairing the Temple of God, which had been long unfrequented, and gone to decay, by reason of the great prevalence of Idolatry; as it had happened in former times. For this purpose he sent *Levites* all over *Israel* and *Judah*, who collected the offerings of such as were disposed to contribute, which were very considerable; and when they had done, they paid the money into the hands of three general receivers, who carried it to *Hilkiah* the High-priest, and told it out before him, and then put it into the hands of the chief carpenters, masons, and other master workmen, employed in the repairs of the Temple: Who were men of such strict piety and good conscience, (like those employed before on the like occasion, 2 *Kings* xii. 15.) that there was no need to call them to account how they laid out the money.

AS they were cleansing the Temple, in the eighteenth year of *Josiah*'s reign, and twenty-sixth of his age, *Hilkiah* the Priest found the book of the law, i. e. a volume of the five Books of *Moses*, supposed to be the original Writing, which was, by the divine Command, to be laid up in the side of the Ark, but in a long disuse of the Temple-Worship, was carelessly laid out of its proper place. This Book *Hilkiah* sent to the King by the hand of *Shaphan* the Scribe, after they had first read some passages of it together. The Scribe, as he was ordered, presented it to the King, and at the same time read in it, the same passages no doubt, as he had read but just before. At the hearing

of

of which the King rent his cloaths; which makes it reasonable to suppose with the *Jewish Doctors*, that the passages now read, were the curses of God denounced against the Nation, both King and people, in case they should forsake the Law, and fall off to Idolatry, as they had done very notoriously. These curses are to be found *Deut. xxviii.* and must needs sound very dreadful to a people who by their guilt had rendered themselves obnoxious to them.

THIS seems to have been the first time that the King had ever heard any thing about them. Which must be imputed to the industry which the idolaters had used to suppress the copies of the Law, and put them out of the way. Just so the persecutors of the Christian Church made it penal for the Christians to keep their Bibles, and burnt and destroyed them where-ever they could find them.

BUT if *Josiah* and his Ministers were such strangers to the Book of the Law, how came the King to have such a religious Education, and how could he set about reforming Religion according to the will of God, before the Book was found? To this it may be answered, that the *Jews* were obliged to extract many passages out of the Law, and to write them upon the walls and doors of their houses. 2dly, Parents were enjoined to teach their children several things *memoriter* in their daily discourse and conversation; so that they might know much of their Law, without having a perfect Book of it. However, we cannot conclude from what we read here, that *Hilkiah* the Priest was a stranger to this Book, as it was copied out in those times; tho' he might not have seen this original of it before. But as to the Book in general, he seems to have been well acquainted with

it;

it ; for I doubt not but he pointed out to *Shaphan* the denunciations of God's Judgments against Idolaters, and directed him to read them in the ears of the King : To whom indeed they were new, so that they caused him to rent his cloaths, and express dreadful apprehensions at the hearing of them.

HERE UPON he commanded *Hilkiah* the Priest, and three or four more principal men of his attendants, to go and enquire of the Lord concerning the words of that Book, what they should do to avert the threatned Judgments ; and appease the Wrath of God which their fathers had kindled against King and People, by disobeying the Voice of the Lord, and doing contrary to those things which their Law required of them.

SO the Priest, and they whom the King had appointed, went and consulted *Huldah* the Prophetess, wife of *Shallum*, keeper of the wardrobe, who dwelt in a College at *Jerusalem* : And if it be demanded, why they did not rather apply to *Jeremiab*, or *Zephaniah*, who prophesied at that time ; it is answered, that *Huldah* was nearer at hand, almost under the same roof with the Querists, to all whom she was well known, being a Prophetess of an established and venerable character, and had often approved her self to be taught of God, by speaking truth in his name ; as she did at this time : For to the question proposed, she answered, That the sentence which was gone out against them, could not be disannulled by any intercessions whatever : For that the curses which were written in that Book, were intended to be brought upon that Generation, because they had forsaken their God, and provoked him to anger with worshipping the works of their own hands ; and had remained

remained impenitent after all the messages and warnings which the Prophets had brought them from God, to assure them of the dreadful consequences of their impieties: That therefore they should become a prey to the swords of their enemies, and be cast out of their Country into a strange Land. That as for their King, God was so pleased with the tenderness of his heart, and the deep concern he was struck with, when he heard the threatenings of the Law, that he would not bring the evil in his days; nor afflict his eyes with the sight of it; but that after his decease the divine Wrath should be poured out upon the people.

THIS answer the Priest and his Associates reported to *Josiah*, who glorified God for the distinguishing love and regard vouchsafed him; and tho' he could not hope to remove the impending calamities, yet resolving to do the best he was able for his time, he called a general assembly of the Princes and People together in *Jerusalem*, and went up into the Temple, and caused the Judgments of God to be read distinctly and audibly before them all. By which having duly affected them with the imminent dangers into which their idolatries had thrown them, he stood up, and proposed that all there present should enter into an engagement of stricter obedience to the Law of God; which he begun in his own person, to this effect; 'That he would walk after the Lord, and keep his Commandments, Testimonies, and Statutes, with all his heart and soul, and perform the words of the Covenant written in that Book.' Which done, he caused all the assembly, every one for himself, to enter into the same engagement, and ratify the same Covenant, that they would put away the

abominations of their forefathers, and faithfully adhere to the Service of the Lord their God. And happy had it been for them, if they had been as sincere in this profession as their King; to whose example tho' they outwardly conformed during his reign, yet even then they continued to be secret idolaters, as the Prophet *Jeremiah* complains of them, who says that

' from the thirteenth year of *Josiah's* reign, to the  
' fourth of his son, he had been calling upon the in-  
' habitants of *Jerusalem* and the men of *Judah* to fear  
' the Lord; but that they were treacherous people,  
' and turned not to him unfeignedly, with all their  
' heart, sacrificing to the Host of Heaven upon the  
' tops of their houses, and keeping the images of strange  
' Gods in their secret chambers.'

AND yet the good King used incredible diligence to root them out. *Josephus* says, that *he ransacked not only every city, but every village and house to discover concealed idols*. The sacred History assures us, that he commanded the officers of the Temple to search and bring out of it all the vessels consecrated to idols, which he burnt without *Jerusalem*, and carried their ashes to *Bethel*. For thither he went, after he had purged *Jerusalem* from idols, and slain the Priests of *Baal* and of the groves, and defiled the valley of the son of *Hinnom*, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass thro' the fire to *Molech*: After he had taken away the horses which the Kings of *Judah* had devoted to the Sun, in imitation of the *Perians*, and broke down the strange altars which they had erected in the courts of the Lord's house, and destroyed the high places which *Solomon* had built for *Astarte* and other idols: (What legions of the powers of darkness were here!) I say, when King *Josiah* had done all these things,

things, he went to *Bethel*. For this was the place where he was to fulfil the famous prophecy which I mentioned before. Accordingly as soon as he came thither, he broke down the altar which *Jeroboam* had made, and burnt his high place, and his grove, and golden calf, and stamped them small to powder. But first he opened the sepulchres of the idolatrous Priests, and took out their bones, and burnt them upon the altar, and polluted it, according to the threatening which God sent to *Jeroboam*, 1 Kings xiii. But he would not suffer any that were about him to disturb the bones of the Prophet who had foretold these things, nor those of the old Prophet of *Samaria*, who was buried in the same grave, and consequently escaped by the same indulgence.

AND all the houses of the high places, that were in the Cities of *Samaria*, which the Kings of *Israel* had made, but were now fallen under the dominion of the Kings of *Judah*, did *Josiah* take away, and did to them according to all that he had done in *Bethel*. For he slew their Priests and burnt them upon their own altars, together with the bones of other men, that he might utterly defile them; and then returned to *Jerusalem*.

HAVING thus shewn his abhorrence of idols, he now turns his thoughts to do some eminent act of honour and worship to the God of *Israel*; and the feast of the Passover being at hand, the King published an edict, commanding that it should be kept exactly according to the Law of *Moses*, and the regulations which King *David* and *Solomon* had made in their reigns, who had taken care to appoint the Priests and *Levites* to attend upon the Service of God in orderly courses. For their numbers being increased far be-

yond what they were in the days of *Moses*, *David* disposed them into convenient divisions and companies, so that all confusion was avoided. He also assigned them new employments, to sing the *Psalms* of his own and others composing, and to play upon variety of musical instruments, whereby he made the divine Service most beautiful and cheerful. All these orders King *Josiah* caused to be punctually observed, so that the performance of the Temple-service was truly glorious. And that the people who were assembled from all parts in very great multitudes, might have a plentiful feast, the King gave thirty thousand Lambs and Kids, and three thousand Bullocks; and the Princes of the Priests and Levites, and other rich men, gave seven thousand six hundred of the smaller, and eight hundred of the larger sort of cattle. All which were offered and divided to the people in such excellent order, and the whole solemnity was begun and ended with so much decency, that the like was never heard of at any *Passover*, from the beginning of their Kingly Government to this time.

THUS wonderfully did *Josiah* signalize his zeal for the Glory of God, in repairing the Temple, in purging *Judah* and *Israel* from Idolatry, in restoring the Assemblies and solemn Rites of God's Worship; and all this in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he was but twenty-six years of age.

MOREOVER the workers with familiar Spirits, and the Wizards, and all the abominations which were known in *Jerusalem* and *Judah*, did *Josiah* put away, in obedience to those words of the Law, which he had heard out of the Book which *Hilkiah* the Priest found in the house of the Lord.

AND

AND now in admiration of the many and worthy deeds which this Prince had done in so few years of life, the sacred Historian sums up his character in the words of my Text, that of *all the kings that went before him, or that came after him, there was none like him.*

WHAT then? Shall we prefer him before *David* and *Hezekiah*, who were incomparably the best Kings of all that went before him? *Procopius Gazæus* thinks that no such preference is intended, but that he excelled *Asa*, *Jehoshaphat* and *Jotham*, who tho' they are said to have governed well, yet came far behind *Josiah* in their zeal and piety. And indeed, when it is said at the beginning of this King's reign, that he walked in all the ways of *David* his father, from which he turned not aside to the right hand or to the left, the same writer can hardly be thought to prefer him before *David* in the words of my Text. However, a diligent observer will find, that there were some blemishes even in *David* and *Hezekiah*, whereas we read of none in the life of *Josiah*. And if we consider how horribly his people were corrupted, both in their Religion and Morals, when he came to the throne; how the usurping Idols had filled the very Temple of God, and the holy City, with their images and altars, and how Princes, Priests, and all orders of men were become their votaries; if we compute the difficulties which this Prince had to struggle with, and how soon he surmounted them all, and had finished the reformation of *Israel* and *Judah*, at an age when other Kings usually begun to reign, we may very justly, and without lessening the character of others, call *Josiah* an incomparable King.

AFTER *Josiah* had thus restored the worship of God, he lived, says *Josephus*, in peace, riches, honour and esteem with all men for the space of thirteen years, as appears by what follows in that Author. And we may conclude from 2 Kings xxii. 1. that he died in the thirty-ninth year of his age; for he was eight years old when he began to reign, and reigned thirty-one years. Thirteen of which he lived in the injury of the good things which he had done for his Kingdom. His death happened on this manner.

THE King of *Egypt*, affecting the Empire of all *Asia*, led a great army towards *Carchemish*, or *Carcifum*, a City upon the river *Euphrates*, where he expected to fight with the *Medes* and *Babylonians*. Now when he drew near to the City of *Mende*, called in Scripture *Megiddo*, (which was subject to *Josiah*, as *Josephus* affirms) King *Josiah* denied him passage, and would not suffer his army to march thro' his Country, either fearing that they would ravage and spoil it, or else because he had an alliance with *Pharaoh*'s enemies. The *Egyptian* assured him by a herald, that he had no mind to molest the King of *Judah*, and warned him to take heed how he opposed him; for, said he, *I make this expedition by the divine command; therefore if you withstand me, you will be destroyed by God, who is with me.* But *Josiah* thought that this speech, in the mouth of an *Infidel*, deserved no regard; and so proceeded to fight with him in a disguise, and came to an engagement in the valley of *Megiddo*; where he was shot by the *Egyptian* Archers, and returning to *Jerusalem*, quickly died of his wounds, and was buried with great magnificence in the sepulcher of the Kings of *Judah*.

THUS was fulfilled the prophecy of *Huldah*, who foretold that the Judgments which were threatened in

the

the Book of the Law, were ready to be poured out upon that generation; but that God in compassion to *Josiah* for his great piety, would first take him out of the world, that his eyes might not see the afflictions; and that he should be gathered to his fathers in peace. And so it came to pass: For tho' he fell by the arms of the *Egyptians*, yet was it in a war which was not designed against him nor his people; whom he left in a peaceable condition to solemnize his funeral, and to place his son on the throne of his father.

**G R E A T** mourning was made for the death of *Josiah*, greater than ever was made for any other of their Kings that we read of. *Jeremiah* lamented him; and all the singing-men, and singing-women, in their mournful elegies, commemorated his loss, as the greatest calamity that had ever befallen them. And they made it an Ordinance in *Israel*, that they should never forget this fatal stroke; as they had reason: for after this they never saw good day. *Josephus* roundly asserts, that the Lamentations of *Jeremiah* which are now extant in our Bibles, were composed upon this occasion: But it is manifest to every one who reads that Book, that it was written after the destruction of *Jerusalem* by the *Babylonians*, which is the main subject of it. I confess I could gladly apply to *Josiah* that passage, iv. 20. which says, *The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord was taken in their pits: of whom we said, under his shadow we shall live among the Heathen:* And to him the ancient Rabbins applied it; tho' modern Commentators think it suits best with the circumstances of *Zedekiah*: But allowing it proper to style him *their breath*, and *the Lord's anointed*; yet I cannot see how *Jeremiah* could conceive hopes of safety under his shadow or protection, whom he

characterizes in his prophecy, as a very bad Governor. Whereas it is certain that both Princes and People did promise themselves this safety under *Josiah's* excellent administration. And if it be hard to understand how *Josiah* was taken in the pits or net of the *Babylonians*, this difficulty, I think, is cleared by saying, that his being unhappily entangled in alliance with the *Babylonians*, exposed him to fall by the arms of the *Egyptians*. After all, I agree with those who say, that *Jeremiah's* elegy which he writ expressly upon the death of *Josiah*, is lost: But since it was usual for a long time to make some mention of him in all elegies, I think we may fairly interpret this passage to be meant of him.

TO conclude: We may justly compare the sin of Idolatry among the *Jews*, to a fretting incurable leprosy, with which the very walls of their houses were sometimes infected; and which obliged them to break down the whole building, and cast away the stones and timber of it into some unclean place without the city, as we read *Levit.* xiv. 45. Just so they were infected with this spiritual leprosy, this sin of Idolatry, which stuck to them, and spread all over them, till it caused them to be cast out of their habitations, and laid their Temple and Cities in the dust. Frequent endeavours had been used to cure it, by *Aса*, by *Hezekiah*, by *Josiah*, which put some stop to it for their time; but as soon as they were gone, how quickly and powerfully did it return again! When we observe, in the accounts of *Josiah's* reformation, how prodigious rank Idolatry was grown, not only in the extreme parts of his Dominions, but even in the Metropolis and Temple it self, we might be tempted to think that it had held quiet possession ever since

since Solomon's time, for even Solomon's groves are mentioned as now standing; did we not know that not an age before, and in the memory of several men now living, *Hezekiah* reformed in much the same method, by cleansing the Temple, breaking images, demolishing high places, cutting down groves. How then came all these things to want a reforming hand so quickly again? Even because a zeal for pure Religion died with this good King, and his successor presently replanted that Idolatry which he had destroyed, and defiled that holy Temple which he had cleansed. And the same thing happened to *Josiah*'s reformation. As soon as he was laid in his grave, his son and successor revived the idolatrous practices of the worst of his predecessors.

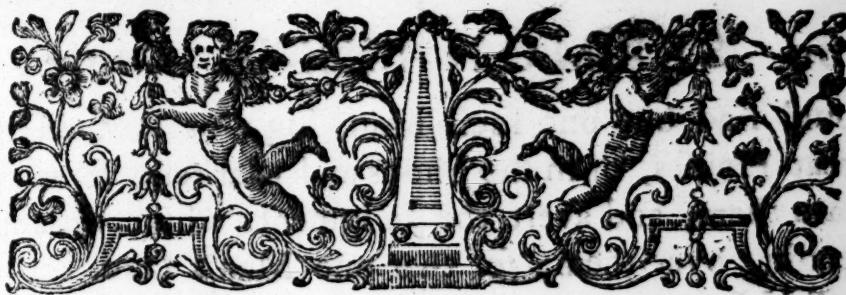
WHAT stability in good ways can be expected from the inconstancy of human administrations, and the variety of spirits, of which the greater part are of the worst sort? However, the tragical end of the *Jewish* Church and State, should warn all Christians that are in authority, what an impolitick part they act, while they suffer such sins to grow up in their Government, as they shall never be able to root out with the most diligent hand, but shall be infected with them till they are destroyed by them.

THERE are other sins, besides gross Idolatry, which by long use and custom have so established themselves in the practice of the people, that the best Teachers and Governors have not been able to extirpate them, so as to save their people from those judgments which they have seen coming upon them. Witness the posterity of these very *Jews*, who were restored from *Babylon* to their fathers inheritances, and constantly abstained from the worship of Idols; and

and yet were so hardened at last in other kind of sins, that they brought themselves into another captivity, in which they remain to this very day; notwithstanding the voice of their great Prophet, who ceased not to admonish them of their sins, and call them to repentance, and foreshewed them the calamities which they had provoked God to prepare for them. This Prophet was our Lord *Jesus Christ*, whose voice may we dutifully hear and follow, that so we may escape the punishment of the disobedient. To him, &c.



SERMON



# SERMON LXXVII.

*On the Fourteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*

M O R N I N G.

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J E R. V. I.

*Run ye to and fro through the Streets of Jerusalem,  
and see now and know, and seek in the broad  
Places thereof, if ye can find a Man, if there  
be any that executeth Judgment, that seeketh  
the Truth, and I will pardon it.*

  
H E S E are the Words of God by the Prophet *Jeremiah*, who prophesied in *Jerusalem* in the days of *Josiah*, *Jeboiakim*, and *Zedekiah*, and testified to the sinful People, that they were ripe for Destruction and Captivity, which came to pass in his own time, and so he lived to see the Accomplishment of his own Predictions. And these Words of my Text shew how just it was with God to pour out his threatened Judgments upon this Generation. For here he challenges the whole City to produce one Man, in any publick Station or Dealings, who was a real Lover of Right, and made Conscience of keeping the Commandments of God; and promises, that if they could

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could find but one such Man, high or low, in the great Houses, or in the Shops and Markets, he would spare them, and avert the Judgments which were impending over them, for that one Man's sake.

THIS was a greater Favour than that which Abraham requested for *Sodom*, which might have been saved, if it could have produced ten righteous Persons. And therefore it intimates to us the abandoned, reprobate State of *Jerusalem*, at this time, when they were so universally immersed in all Sorts of Impiety and Immorality. We will observe their Sins in the Order wherein the Prophet has set them down, in this very Chapter now before us.

AND the first Breach of Truth which he charges upon them, was a monstrous gross one, no less than deliberate and wilful Perjury. *Though, says he, they say, The Lord liveth, surely they swear falsely.* Now this was horrible indeed, that they had so familiarized Oaths, the most solemn Acts of Religion, as not to regard whether the Matter which they swore to were true or false. And it was a farther Aggravation of their Sin, That though they knew they were under the Inspection of the Divine Majesty, from whom they could conceal no secret thing; and though they smarted under the Strokes of his Vengeance, and were consumed for their Impiety, yet they still persisted in it, and refused to receive Correction; 'till at last their King *Zedekiah* breaking his Oath of fealty to the King of *Babylon*, compleated the Ruin of himself and his People.

2dly, THEIR next Breach of Truth was Idolatry. *They forsook God the Fountain of living Waters, and hewed out to themselves Cisterns, broken Cisterns which could hold no Water.* It was a strange thing to

see

see how madly this People ran after the lying Vanities of the *Gentiles*, after they had received such manifold and undeniable Proofs of the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of a living God, who was present with them; after so many Laws enacted against Idolatry, so many signal Judgments inflicted on them for falling into this Sin, such a Hedge and Fence set about them to keep them from mingling with other Nations, lest they should learn their Ways; and yet there was scarce any Abomination of this kind, with which they were not polluted, and the Land of *Israel* was a common Receptacle for the absurd Religions of all the Heathens round about. These nauseous Corruptions were very much owing to the prophane Marriages of their Kings. The Wisdom of *Solomon* was not proof against such bosom Seducers; and *Ahab*'s *Jezabel* made him a thorough *Sidonian* Idolater, and filled his Kingdom with *Baal*'s Priests. Such Matches constantly proved the Subversion of the true Religion, insomuch that after the first leprosy of Idolatry introduced by *Solomon*, there was not one good King in *Israel*, and very few in *Judah*. The Book of God's Law, which contained the Oracles of true Religion, was commonly lost and buried in rubbish, *his Altars were thrown down, and his Priests slain with the Sword.*

NOW when God was thus affronted by his own People, whom he had chosen out of all Nations of the Earth for this very Purpose, that they might serve him in Opposition to all other Gods; when they chose those other Gods and rejected him, it was then high time to execute upon them that Curse which he had denounced to this very Sin, *that when they defiled their own Land with Idols, they should serve Wood and Stone in a Land which was not theirs.*

*3dly, THEY* farther violated the purity of God's righteous Laws by their Adulteries and Fornications. *They assembled by troops in the Harlots Houses: they were as fed Horses; every one neighed after his Neighbour's wife.* This Lewdness was sometimes a concomitant of their Idolatries; for many rites of Pagan Religion were celebrated with Drunkenness, Uncleanliness, and all sorts of Debauchery. But even when there were no Idolatries practised in *Israel*, the Jews were much addicted to this Vice. Our Saviour calls the Scribes and *Pharisees* *an adulterous Generation*; and *Josephus*, in his History of them, assures us, that this character was literally true.

**N**O W this was a Crime of a high Nature, a complication of Sins, and productive of so many sad consequences, that death was the just punishment allotted to it. But who shall pronounce Sentence, where all are Guilty? when every one hath thus corrupted his way, it then becomes necessary for God the Supreme Judge to remove such a provoking People out of his sight.

*4thly, ANOTHER* breach of Truth was their shameful prevaricating with God's Word, and torturing it to make it speak contrary to its genuine sense and meaning. To this end they encouraged false Prophets, who would prophesy smooth things, put away the evil day far from them, speak Peace to them in the name of the Lord, though he did not send them, carefully avoid falling into such discourses as were apt to convince them of Sin, and awaken their Conscience.

**T**H E Y would either keep clear of displeasing Texts, or handle them with so much art and subtle distinctions, as to make them pliant enough to the

manners of their Hearers. In many cases they would harden themselves against the plainest threatenings of God's Word, and say in their worst circumstances, *Evil shall not come, neither shall we see Sword nor Famine.* They would not see with their Eyes, nor hear with their Ears, the things which were most obvious to those Senses. This we know, by our own woful Experience, is possible to be done. Wicked men can confess a God, and own his Word, and yet not be moved by it to turn from their evil ways. This is a desperate condition, and calls for Judgments to destroy, rather than for a Rod to correct.

5thly, THEY were very unthankful to God, and insensible of his Blessings conferred upon them. Though he gave them the former and the latter rain in season, and caused the ground to yield them a plentiful Harvest, yet were they not induced hereby to look up to him, and glorifie him for his Mercies, and fear to sin against him; but on the contrary, they offered the Portion which was due to his Temple and Altar, in Sacrifice to Idols; they consumed their abundance upon their Lusts, to the multiplying of their Sins and Transgressions: They grew more proud, insolent, and cruel to their Inferiors, more covetous and apt to withhold that which was due to others, oppressing the Hireling in his wages, and suffering their Poor to perish for want of that relief which God had commanded them to bestow upon them. Now this very thing is noted as one reason why they were carried into Captivity, *that the Lands which they had over-tilled, might enjoy their Sabbaths.* A spirit of Covetousness had led them to till their Land in the Sabbatical years, when by their Law it should have lain fallow, and their poor People should

should have reaped that which the ground brought forth of its own accord in those years of rest. But so unthankful were they to God, and so unmerciful to their poor Brethren, that they neglected this Law for seventy years, and for so many years they were doomed to the *Babylonian Captivity*.

6thly, **T H E Y** were very fraudulent in their dealings one with another, both in word and deed. It was a common thing for wicked men to circumvent and ensnare the righteous, and by false accusations to bring them into Courts of Judicature. And it was easie for them to obtain a Sentence against them, and wholly to ruin them, or extort from them a high composition, because their Judges were very apt to take Bribes, and to have respect of mens Persons in Judgment, as this and other Prophets plainly inform us. In their buying and selling, false weights and measures were used without scruple. In making up of their Manufactures, an universal Fraud and Couzenage prevailed, that the Maker and Seller might get more at present, and that their Customers being served with slight goods, might be obliged to buy again the sooner. The Prophet *Isaiah* accuses them for adulterating their Coin and their Liquors; *Thy Silver*, says he, *is become dross, thy wine mixed with water*. And this Prophet here upbraids them, that their Houses, filled with ill-gotten goods, were become as nests of rapacious Birds; *therefore, says he, are they become great and waxes rich: they are waxes fat and shine*; they made a splendid and gallant figure in those Ornaments which they had got by dishonesty, without any concern or shame, that they had obtained them by such unjust means.

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WHAT can be the end of a People whose Laws are so overborn by the false Witness, the corrupt and partial Judge, the powerful Oppressor? Who are so continually abusing the good ends of Commerce and Traffick, and subverting one another in the making, buying and selling of their Manufactures, their Food and Raiment, and every thing that is vendible? A Nation of such People must needs, by the tendency of such Politicks, devour one another, and be fit for nothing but Slaves and Captives. Both Spoiler and Spoiled must come to nothing.

Lastly, THAT which portended the Extirpation of these Jews most certainly was, that not only all the forecited Iniquities were notorious in practice, but were moreover approved of as it were, and settled among them by common consent. *The Prophets, says he, prophesie falsely, and the Priests bear rule by their means, and my People love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?* A numerous tribe of hungry Prophets, who had no Mission nor Revelation from God, were not so much concerned for the Truth, as for their own Interest, by which they were prompted to swim with the Tide, and studied to speak such things as were pleasing to their Masters, being ever ready, as another Prophet says, *Ezek. xiii. 19. to slay the Righteous and spare the Wicked, for handfuls of Barley and morsels of Bread; i. e. to oppose or favour men, not according to their real merits, but just as the Prophets Masters, and their own Interest directed.* This sinful compliance of theirs was acceptable to the Priests, whose manners were generally such as exposed them to the severe reproofs of the true Prophets of God, as their Writings testify: and therefore they were well pleased when such re provers were run down.

by an opposite faction of Prophets, who pretended to be inspired, and sent to contradict them in the Name of the Lord. And the People, in the third place, were likewise well satisfied both with Prophets and Priests, because their Morals were such as would not bear the true Prophets censure, according as they are already set forth.

NOW what can be the issue of such a state of things? What Antidote is there left to expel national corruptions, when those who should remove them, are their strenuous Advocates and Patrons, and the governing part in all Orders of men consent that they should prevail and flourish as they do?

IN such a state of things as this, where-ever it obtains, we may imagine the supreme Governor of the World to say to the Members of it in the words of my Text, *Run through the streets of your City, seek and enquire in the high Places thereof, if ye can find a Man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it.* But he will not pardon those Communities which are immerst in as many deadly Sins as corrupt *Jerusalem*. In this case St. Paul's argument is grounded upon the strongest reason, *if God spared not the natural branches, expect him not to be more indulgent to those who are but ingrafted in their room.*

LET the People of any Nation, City, or Society, try themselves, and prognosticate their own doom by that of *Jerusalem*: that once holy and happy City, where God declared that he delighted to dwell; where he erected the only Temple and Altar which he had in the World: Where he manifested his special Presence by mighty Signs and Wonders, and miraculous Protections of the place from a world of Adversaries

aries round about: Where the Tables were reposit-  
ed of that Sacred Law, which he proclaimed from  
Heaven with his own mouth, and wrote with his  
own hand: And where the Bodies of many of  
his dearest Saints were committed to the grave.  
Even this City, precious in the sight of God up-  
on so many Accounts, is given up by him into the  
hands of the *Gentiles*, who have consumed the most  
sacred things of it with fire, defaced its beauty, de-  
molished its walls and splendid Palaces, the work of  
the most ingenious Architects of Old, slain Myriads  
with Sword, Famine, and Pestilence, and carried the  
Remainder into a slavish and irksome Captivity. If  
any man ask, why God hath so abhorred and forsa-  
ken the Habitation of his Holiness, he gives us the  
reasons of it in this same Chapter. Perjury, Idolatry,  
Uncleanness, and all the rest of the deadly Sins, were  
grown predominant in it. Insomuch that *Isaiah* styles  
it *Sodom*, and the Citizens of it the People of *Gomor-  
rab*. This is enough to prove that it was fit for no-  
thing but the fire, and it hath received that just re-  
compence of Reward. And the history of it is record-  
ed for the Instruction of all other Cities who have  
the Sacred Scriptures to instruct them. They may  
hear *Jerusalem* warning them, saying, 'Look upon  
' me, and learn to fear God. Will ye steal, and mur-  
' der, and commit Adultery, and swear falsely, and  
' sacrifice to the Idols of your own imagination, and  
' hope to escape the Wrath of God better than I have  
' done? Will ye not be instructed by my example, and  
' execute judgment, while the long-suffering of God  
' endures, that he may turn from his Wrath, and be  
' gracious unto you? He sent me to *Shiloh*, *Jer.* vii.  
' 12. where he had placed his Name and Worship

‘ at the first, that I might see how he had made that  
‘ place a desolation, for the wickedness of them that  
‘ dwelt therein. But I had not the grace to profit  
‘ by this admonition. For which neglect I am now  
‘ myself become an instance of the divine Vengeance  
‘ for Sin. Let my Calamities conduce to your Sal-  
‘ vation, and put away those Sins from among you,  
‘ which have laid me in ruinous heaps, and turned  
‘ me into a Monument of the divine Fury. *Look up-*  
‘ *on me, and learn to fear God.*’

SUCH a lesson of Repentance we may naturally suppose this degenerate City to preach to us. We may justly conclude that the like provocations will bring down the like judgments upon any other place. For the nature of Sin is not changed; it is now as odious to God, as ever it was in any former Age of the World. And where-ever it prevails against the voice of God’s Word, and the Laws of Virtue, it is the fruitful Parent of innumerable Calamities to such a Place. And all those who abandon themselves to the service of it, are the Enemies of the publick Prosperity and Welfare; and contribute, as far as in them lies, to turn this World into such a place as Hell is represented to be, where there is a complication of all kind of Misery, and nothing to be heard but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of Teeth.

I wish this was but as seriously laid to Heart as it is certainly true, that every man who provokes God with his impieties, is an Enemy to the publick good. He that assaults Heaven with a blasphemous Tongue, he that invocates the Sacred Name of God to attest that which is false, or to enforce that which is sinful and ought not to be done, is strictly and properly an Incendiary in the Community where he lives. For though

though he does not take Fire in his Hand, and set it to the Houses of the City, yet by a Tongue which is set on fire of Hell, he stirs up the divine Fury and Vengeance to break out upon us in burnings, and other direful tokens of an angry God. He that gives up himself to rioting, drunkenness, and other debaucheries which are the fruits of such excess, is the Author of Scarcity and dearth of Provisions where he lives, both as by himself he consumes a great deal more meat and drink than properly comes to his own share, and thereby wrongs somebody else of it; and also as he provokes God to withhold those good things from us, which are so vilely abused both to his and our own dishonour and reproach.

HE that abuses the World in his Trust and Office, or in his Commerce and Dealings, is continually acting such things as tend to dissolve the Society where he lives. For his frauds help to impoverish others, and sometimes reduce them to the lowest indigence and distress; and the unjust gains which he heaps up for himself, prove no better than so many briars and thorns, always creating troubles both to himself, and to those of his Household and Posterity.

Finally, THOSE who are enemies to Religion, and help to banish the Fear of God out of the World, by denying the Authority of his Word, or by putting a wrong sense and construction upon it, are as bad Members as can be found in any Society of men, because they do what they can to subvert the very foundations of Truth, and deprive us of the last remedy which is left to repair the breaches of Piety and Virtue in a sinful World. He who casts any slight or contempt upon the Ordinances of Religion, by neglecting them himself, or encouraging others to neg-

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lest them, is so far an Enemy to every branch of the good of human Society, which was never known to flourish in any place where the Exercise of Religion was in a low and fading condition.

THIS consideration of the publick Welfare and Prosperity, should animate every one of us with a zeal and love for the truth, upon which the publick good so entirely depends, as has been demonstrated. If we had nothing to hope or fear after this Life, yet a concern for the preservation of the City or Society where we live, should dispose us to observe the Laws of truth and righteousness in all our Actions. If these had been duly observed in *Jerusalem*, it had remained a praise upon Earth to this day. And so had many other once flourishing Cities, which are now decayed and come to nothing, because *they refused to execute Judgment, and seek after the Truth.*

*WHAT is Truth,* is no such slight Question, as *Pilate* made of it, when he would not stay for an answer. It comprehends every thing that is right and good. It is the vital Spirit of every Community which is well founded amongst Men. Where the name of God is sanctified, where his ordinances are duly attended, where good Laws are enacted against profaneness and immorality, and those Laws diligently executed; in short, where that celebrated Rule is made the standard of Dealings, *That every Man do to others as he would they should do to him*, there People may be truly said to execute Judgment, and to seek after the Truth.

AND while they thus order their Conversation, they may upon the best grounds hope for the divine Blessing and Protection. Nay, where they cannot so far prevail as to make a Majority, yet if there be but

a competent number who walk uprightly, God commonly for their sakes preserves the Society of which they are Members. Which should powerfully incline us to do that which is according to the Will of God, that under him we may be instruments of so much good to our Brethren; and to set a value upon those whom we see in this and in other places seeking after the Truth. *Peace be on them and Mercy*, as upon the Children of God, and worthy Members of his blessed Son, who delights in the Salvation of Mankind, and redeems us from Death no otherwise than by first redeeming us from our Sins, and conforms us to the Image of his own Holiness, in order to qualifie us for his Happiness. To him, &c.





## SERMON LXXVIII.

*On the Fourteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*

E V E N I N G.

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JEREM. xxii. 3.

*Thus saith the Lord, Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.*

THESE words are part of a message which God sent by the Prophet Jeremiah, to the royal family of Judah, the sinful posterity of that great and worthy King Josiah, who reigned after him, with whom this Prophet was personally acquainted; for he began to prophesy in the thirteenth year of Josiah, and continued so to do till Jerusalem was destroyed, and Zedekiah the last King was carried away captive to Babylon.

KING Josiah had four sons, who are thus named *1 Chron. iii. 15.* the first-born Johanan, the second Joakim, the third Zedekiah, the fourth Shallum; the first

first of these died, as is justly supposed, before his father; all the rest sat successively upon the throne of *Judah*, and as such *Jeremiah* mentions them in this and the foregoing Chapter.

FIRST he tells us, ch. xxi. how *Zedekiah* sent to him, desiring him to enquire of the Lord concerning the event of the war, which *Nebuchadnezzar* King of *Babylon* was carrying on against *Jerusalem* and *Judah*; and to intercede with God, that he would so order things, that the *Chaldeans* should withdraw their forces from them. This you see was in the last extremity of the *Jews*, under their last King. But now here in the xxii. chap. the Prophet changes the scene and the time of his prophecy, and comes back from *Zedekiah*, to the three foregoing Kings, all which he mentions in this Chapter. First he says that *Shallum* the son of *Josiah* reigned in his father's stead. Now we read in the History of the Kings, that upon the death of *Josiah*, the people anointed his son *Jeboahaz*, and made him King in his father's stead. This is the same with *Shallum* here; for they had all two names: In the *Chronicles* he is reckoned last, as the youngest of *Josiah*'s sons: But that could not be; *Zedekiah* was certainly the youngest. They might, for some reason, be placed out of the order of their birth, as were the three sons of *Noah*, and some others in the Jewish genealogies.

BUT neither was this *Jeboahaz*, or *Shallum*, the eldest of *Josiah*'s sons. For he was but twenty-three years old when he began to reign, and reigned but three months. For the King of *Egypt*, returning in that time from *Garchusium*, whither he went at the end of *Josiah*'s reign, imagining that this *Shallum* would prove his enemy, and resolving to oblige another,

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ther, he deposed him, and made his brother *Eliakim*, whom he named *Jeboiakim*, King in his stead; who being at that time twenty-five years of age, it is plain that he was the elder brother.

*JEHOIAKIM* reigned eleven years, thus: The first four years he was tributary to his patron the King of *Egypt*. But then *Nebuchadnezzar* brought an army into *Syria*, and drove away the *Egyptians*, who had over-run it, as far as *Pelusium*. But he did not meddle with *Jeboiakim*, (as *Josephus* thinks) till four years after; when he led his army against *Jerusalem*, and demanded tribute of the *Jews*. *Jeboiakim*, not being able to withstand him, submitted, and paid tribute for three years. At the end of which (understanding that the *Egyptians* were up in arms against the *Babylonians*) he refused to make any farther payment, depending upon the *Egyptians* that they would release him: But he was disappointed of his hopes; for *Nebuchadnezzar* proving victorious, quickly sent to *Jerusalem*, and took some of the sacred Vessels of the Temple, and three thousand of the chief men of *Jerusalem*, and carried them away to *Babylon*.

AFTER his decease, his son *Jeboiachin* was set upon the Throne, at eighteen years of age; but whether by his own people, or by *Nebuchadnezzar*, is uncertain. This King is called *Jeconiah*, *1 Chron. iii. 16.* and *Coniah* by our Prophet in this Chapter, by way of contempt, as some think. For such abbreviations of names among us, are reckoned too familiar to consist with the dignity of great persons. When he had reigned three months and ten days, *Nebuchadnezzar*, suspecting perhaps that he would take part with the *Egyptians* against him, sent his servants against *Jerusalem*, and besieged it; and after some time he came

thither

thither in person. Upon his summons, *Jeboiachin* went out to him with his Mother, Servants, Princes and Officers, and surrendered up the City into his hands. What followed upon this surrender, showed that *Nebuchadnezzar* was absolute Master of the lives and fortunes of King and People: For he carried away almost all the treasures of the Temple and the Royal Palace, and took captive the Royal Family, the Princes, and mighty men of valour, the artificers and smiths, and all the men that were strong and fit for war, leaving few besides the inferior sort of people, over whom he made *Zedekiah* King, as we read at large 2 Kings xxiv.

*JOSEPHUS* his account of this captivity is somewhat different. He says that when *Nebuchadnezzar* had sent his Captains to besiege *Jerusalem*, King *Joachin*, considering that it was for his sake that this distres was come upon them, took his wife and nearest relations, and voluntarily delivered them up as hostages and pledges of his fealty, into the hands of *Nebuchadnezzar*'s Captains, receiving at the same time an oath from them, that neither his Family nor City should be injured by them. ' But this promise, says ' he, continued not a year; for *Nebuchadnezzar* ob- ' served it not, but commanded his Captains to impri- ' son all the young men and artificers that were in the ' City, and to bring them bound unto *Babylon*: And ' that the number of them was ten thousand eight ' hundred thirty and two persons, beside the King, his ' mother, and near relations.'

*JEHOIACHIN* being thus removed, *Nebuchadnezzar* made his uncle *Zedekiah*, who was the youngest son of *Josiah*, King in his stead. He was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he  
reigned

reigned eleven years in *Jerusalem*; during which time he contemned the Laws, and perverted the Ordinances of God, as *Josephus* expresses it; who adds, that he kept young men about him who were meer Atheists, and that all the people under his dominion committed outrages, and did whatever seemed good in their own eyes. And to fill up the measure of their iniquities, their King violated his oath which he had taken to *Nebuchadnezzar*, and rebelled against him. For when the *Babylonian* advanced *Zedekiah* to the Throne, he caused him to swear that he would be a friend to the *Chaldeans*, and never enter into any alliance with their enemies the *Egyptians*. But he shewed himself a perfidious man, and acted a contrary part, which so provoked the *Babylonian*, that he came and destroyed him and his people without mercy, and burnt the City and Temple down to the ground, and carried the remainder of the people, and their precious things, into captivity.

FROM this account which I have given of the family of *Josiah*, it appears, that after him four Kings reigned to the end of the Kingdom of *Judah*, of which three were his sons, and one was his grandson; that the first and third reigned but three months apiece, and the second and fourth eleven years apiece; so that all the time of their four reigns put together, made but twenty-two years and a half; and all their lives were troublesome, and their deaths tragical; the three last were carried away by the King of *Babylon*, each in his turn, with so many people, and so much treasure every time, that it has puzzled learned men in which reign to begin the account of the seventy years captivity. And it is justly their wonder, to consider, that the last remains of these people should

not

not repent and turn to God, after they had seen, as they needs must, in so short a time, so many of their relations and acquaintance carried into a state of slavery, in an Enemy's country. But so incorrigible were they, that *Ezekiel* complains, that even in this state (in which he saw them, for he was an exile with them) they persisted in their impieties, and were not at all amended. His whole prophecy is full of complaints of their incurable hardness. And in his xiii chap. he tells us, that they still entertained false Prophets (unto whom they hearkened rather than to *Ezekiel*) who saw visions of peace for *Jerusalem*, when there was no peace ; i. e. they made the people believe that *Jerusalem* should not be taken by the *Chaldeans*, but that they should all be restored to it again in a little time.

NO more regard did they pay to the denunciations of *Jeremiah*, tho' he promised them by a special commission in the name of the Lord, that if they would perform the injunctions of my Text, the royal family of *David* should still continue to reign, and the palace and throne be supported with the usual attendance and magnificence. But that the Lord had sworn, that if they would not hearken to the words of my Text, *their royal house should become a desolation*.

AND what were these injunctions? Why, that the King (whether *Shallum*, *Jeboiakim*, or *Jeconiah*, no matter which; the Prophet knew them all) that the King, I say, should see that justice and judgment were executed, that the spoiled should be delivered out of the hand of the oppressor, that the stranger, the fatherless and widow should be protected from injuries, and due care be taken to prevent the shedding of innocent blood.

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IN laying which charge upon the King, methinks I hear the Prophet speak to this effect: ' Sir, if you do not take care of these things, your Government is nothing. For you are the fountain of Justice and Judgment, which subordinate Magistrates will certainly pervert, if you don't shew your self a zealous lover of them, and a terrible avenger of all their neglects. The weaker sort of your people, especially the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, are liable to a thousand injuries from the pride or avarice of the rich and mighty. And who can defend them from these sons of violence but you, who by your station are raised so high, as to be above the fear or favour of all mankind, and have nothing to withhold your hand from administering impartial justice; but can securely crush every oppressor, and let the fierce and insolent know, that if he sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.'

BUT is it not better that Kings should be discharged from such low thoughts, as the care of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow? Is it not more princely and royal to be the Commander of mighty armies, the Founder of stately palaces, to be surrounded with Guards, and attended with Nobles, to amass mighty treasures, and contract great alliances, and enjoy all sorts of pleasures and delights without restraint? Durst our Prophet himself have controvuled such a spirit as this in the house of *Judah*? If we seek forward into this Chapter, we shall find him reproving it in *Jeboiakim*, the second of the three Kings whom he mentions here, and to whom he was sent with the injunctions of my Text. *Shalt thou reign*, says he, or *shalt thou establish thy throne, and prolong thy days in greater security, because thou encloseth thy self in cedar, building*

building a large house, spacious chambers, and cieling them with cedar, and painting them with vermillion? *Did not thy father eat and drink, contenting himself with moderate, necessary things, and do judgment and justice? and then it was well with him: He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know me? saith the Lord.*

BY Jeboiakim's father, he either means his immediate father *Josiah*, who made it his busines to glorify God, and do good to his people; or his more remote father King *David*, whose *Psalms* abundantly testify, how much he had it at heart to do the same, and how bitterly he repented it, whenever, by any omission or commission, he transgressed such duties of his station as are mentioned in the words of my Text.

AS for *David*'s regard to the Law of God in general, let *Psalm cxix.* witness how heartily he prayed to be instructed in it. As a King he resolves *Psalm ci.* to govern, first himself, and then his Court and Kingdom, with so much justice, that good men might expect all favour from him, but no wicked man of any sort have the least countenance or encouragement. *I will, says he, behave my self wisely in a perfect way; I will walk in my house with a perfect heart, ' sincerely endeavouring to make my self a pattern of all piety and virtue to my Court.'* *I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the sins of unfaithfulness; no such thing shall cleave unto me.* *' No pretended reasons of state shall tempt me to project any thing against the Law, to which I will ever confine my self: For I abhor the practices of those, who forsake that rule to pursue their own private interests and inclinations: No such corrupt principles shall ever find a place in my mind. A froward heart shall depart from*

‘ from me: I will not know a wicked person: I will turn  
‘ him instantly out of my service, who shall dare to  
‘ suggest to me any unrighteous counsels: I will have  
‘ no familiarity with him, much less make him my fa-  
‘ vorite, who makes no conscience how he com-  
‘ passes his ends. *Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour,*  
‘ *him will I cut off: him that hath a high look and a*  
‘ *proud heart, I will not suffer: I will be so far from*  
‘ *listening to their private whispers, who by secret*  
‘ *calumnies and detractions endeavour to supplant the*  
‘ *righteous, that I will severely punish them. Nor*  
‘ *will I endure those, whose pride makes them over-*  
‘ *look all others, as if they were another species of*  
‘ *creatures; or whose unsatiable covetousness and am-*  
‘ *bition, makes them study their own advancement*  
‘ *more than the publick good. Mine eyes shall be upon*  
‘ *the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me:*  
‘ *he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me: I*  
‘ *will look out for faithful persons, men fearing God,*  
‘ *and of clear integrity; and in what part of the Land*  
‘ *soever I find them, I will make them of my privy-*  
‘ *council; and no man shall bear any office under me,*  
‘ *but he that behaves himself unblameably in it. He*  
‘ *that worketh deceit, shall not dwell within my house:*  
‘ *he that telleth lies, shall not tarry in my sight: No*  
‘ *subtil knave, that is made up of fraud and artifice,*  
‘ *or that devises ways and means to oppress my sub-*  
‘ *jects, shall remain in my service: Tho’ he have*  
‘ *craftily got into it under a guise of simplicity; yet*  
‘ *no false informer, flatterer, or any sort of liar, shall*  
‘ *continue in my favour. I will early destroy all the*  
‘ *wicked out of the land; that I may cut off evil-doers*  
‘ *from the city of the Lord: As soon as ever I discover*  
‘ *iniquity, I will use my utmost diligence to correct*  
‘ *it;*

it; especially in the place of my peculiar residence, which ought to be an example to the rest of my Kingdom: Taking care of the courts of Justice, that they punish offenders according to their demerits; and that they cut off those evil members, who have got an incurable habit of doing wickedly.'

SUCH were the vows and resolutions which *David* made for the rules of his Kingly Government, very worthy of the man after God's own heart, whom he had raised from the sheepfold to be the Ruler of his people; and he put them together and recorded them in *Psalm* ci. that it might be a memorial to himself of what he had vowed to do; and to his people, of what they might expect from him; and to his sons and successors, and all other Kings who should read them, to assist them and put them in mind of the duties of their station.

And yet this great Prince could not think this excellent model of Government sufficient: But in his last days, when he appointed his son *Solomon* to ascend his throne, he composed the lxxii *Psalm* for his use: 'Wherein he beseeches God to endue him with such a sound judgment and such an honest heart, that he might always govern his people according to the divine Laws, and administer his affairs with such impartial justice and clemency, that his poorest subjects might be maintained in their rights, or recover them, when lost, from powerful oppressors. He prays that his son might have grace to consider the cause of the meanest of the people, to save the children of the needy, and to break in pieces their oppressors. That he might come down like rain upon the grass; or as the showers that water the Earth: Graciously condescending to people of low

degree, and treating them in so gentle a manner, as might make his authority no less acceptable, than showers of rain in the heat of summer are to the thirsty parched fields. That in his days the righteous might flourish; that he might be the saviour of him that had no helper; that he might rescue friendless innocents from falsehood and violence, and be very sparing of their blood, and as tender of their lives, as of those of his greatest subjects.'

SO prays King *David* for his son *Solomon*, for such a spirit of Government in him, as he assures him would be the foundation of all his happiness. And here I might finish this kind of citations, but that I cannot, in honour to the other sex, omit the advice of King *Lemuel*'s mother; who, whatever she were (for that is not agreed amongst Interpreters) was so wise a woman, that her discourse has obtained a place with the works of King *Solomon*, and makes the last Chapter of the *Proverbs*. In this advice she recommends several qualifications of a good Governor, which were so necessary to make him happy and useful in his Government, that there was no doing without them. I shall mention three of them.

THE *First* is, to subdue that carnal lust, which she knew to be very violent in youth, especially in young Princes; who have more provocations, and are apt to be more licentious than other men: But fail not by such lewdness to bring such mischiefs upon themselves and their Kingdoms, as are not to be repaired, and often end in their destruction.

*Secondly*, She admonishes him to avoid the intemperate use of wine, and to keep himself always cool and sober, that he might be able to give a right judgment upon causes when they were brought before

fore him. *It is not, says she, for kings to drink wine, nor princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.*

Thirdly, She charges him to administer Justice exactly to all his subjects, and not merely to commit the care of it to others, but sometimes to sit in person upon the Tribunal: And if he saw a man in danger to lose his right, because he was not able to make it out thro' fear, ignorance, or want of elocution; then she bids the King her son to assist him in his defence, and make it out for him, as soon as he perceives that the cause is good, and only suffers by wrong management, *Open thy mouth for the dumb, in the cause of all such as are appointed for destruction.* And when he had cleared up the righteousness of the cause, presently to bring it to a speedy issue, and to make an end of it by a just sentence, that the honest man might have the benefit of it, and not be oppressed and impoverished by tedious delays.

FROM what has been said, we must conclude, that it was very fit for God to send to the Kings of Judah such a message as is contained in the words of my Text, *That they should execute judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor; and do no wrong nor violence to the stranger, the fatherless, or the widow, nor defile the land with the shedding of innocent blood.* For it appears from the Law of God, and the maxims of Government laid down by the best of men, that these things are so properly the care of Princes, that they are but an empty name without it. *Thy father, said Jeremias to Jeboiakim, did judgment and justice.* He might have quoted to him the example of his ancestor King Jekosaphat; *& Chron. xix.* who not only appointed Judges in all

the Cities of *Judah*, but gave them a solemn charge with his own mouth to take heed what they did. *For, says he, ye judge not for man, ye are much more answerable to God, who is present with you, and hears your judgments. Wherefore let his fear be upon you, take heed and act as in his presence : remembering that you represent him who cannot commit iniquity, nor respect persons, nor take bribes.* Moreover, when he returned to *Jerusalem*, he constituted there a supreme Court, which should receive appeals from their brethren of the inferior Cities, in matters which were too hard for them. And he charged them, saying, *What cause soever shall come before you, discuss it faithfully, and with a perfect heart, as men who have the fear of God before their eyes. In doing of which you will please God, and prevent his wrath from falling upon you and your brethren.*

THUS might *Jeremiah* have derived an authority to his injunctions from the practice of this, and all other good Kings; and even from the example of the King of Kings, who glories in the style of the God of Judgment and Justice, the Father of the fatherless, the Husband of the widow, who helpeth them to right that suffer wrong, who feedeth the hungry: who constantly makes inquisition for innocent blood; and when he makes it, he neglects not the cry of that of the poorest creature. He standeth in the congregation of Princes, says *Asaph*; he is the supreme of all Judges. He calls them to the Laws of truth, saying, ‘ How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the rich and powerful? Why do not ye defend the poor and fatherless, and do justice to the afflicted and needy? Deliver the poor and helpless, rescue them out of the hands of wicked men.’

NOW since he that dwelleth in the highest Heavens, humbles himself to regard the meanest of the children of men, let not the highest upon Earth reckon it too low and lessening a condescension to do the same. Why, such gracious regards and protections God has made the indispensable conditions of his Blessings, the stability of Thrones, the exaltation of Kingdoms, the walls and bulwarks about them, to defend them from foreign invasions, And tho' he was highly offended with these Kings of *Judah* here mentioned, and upon the point of sending them into captivity, as he quickly did, yet he so delights in those who exercise loving-kindness and judgment and righteousness in the Earth, that he stands to treat with them upon this foot, promising to continue them and their posterity in the possession of their Kingdom, if they would but obey these injunctions.

SOME such overture was made to *Israel* upon the same condition, by the Prophet *Amos*, v. ' Hearken, ' says he, ye that turn judgment into wormwood, ' and leave off to exercise righteousness in the earth. ' Seek unto him who strengtheneth the spoiled a- ' gainst the strong; and be not of the number of ' those who hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and ' abhor him that speaketh uprightly. Forasmuch as ' you trample upon the poor, and take away his ' bread by violence; ye have built houses of hewen ' stone, but shall not dwell in them: Ye have planted ' pleasant vineyards, but shall not drink wine of ' them. You afflict the just, and take bribes, and ' turn aside the poor in the gate from their right. ' Now therefore change your ways; seek good, and ' not evil, that ye may live; and so the Lord, the ' God of Hosts shall be with you. Hate the evil, and

‘ I love the good, and establish judgment in the gate:  
 ‘ It may be that the Lord God of Hosts will be  
 ‘ gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.’

THE same expedient did *Daniel* recommend to *Nebuchadnezzar* for the averting of God’s anger, chap. iv. when he had explained to him his ominous dream, and told him it was the decree of the most High to drive him from among men, and cause him to eat grass with the beasts of the field; *Wherefore*, said he, *O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.*

HOW beautiful is the righteousness recommended in my Text, that when put on it can hide such a multitude of sins as were in *Israel*, in *Judah*, in the palace of *Babylon*! Let us beseech God to distinguish us with this most amiable feature of his own divine Majesty, that abounding in this righteousness we may be conformed to the image of his dear Son, *that king of Israel who hath fulfilled all righteousness*, who came to call us poor sinners into his heavenly Kingdom, and to make us partakers of the riches of his mercy, in whose sight our souls and bodies are precious; to him with &c.





## SERMON LXXIX.

On the Fifteenth Sunday after TRINITY.

M O R N I N G.

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J E R E M. xxxv. 18, 19.

And *Jeremiah* said unto the *House of the Rechabites*, *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel*, *Because ye have obeyed the Commandment of Jonadab your Father, and kept all his Precepts, and done according to all that he hath commanded you:*

*Therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab the Son of Rechab shall not want a Man to stand before me for ever.*

**H**I S Chapter contains a remarkable instance of filial Obedience in the Family of the *Rechabites*, to the injunctions of their Ancestor; and it is urged here as a just reproof of the Impiety of the whole Kingdom of *Judah*, who continued in their Idolatries and other gross violations of the known Laws of God, notwithstanding the Voice of the Prophets which he raised

up among them by a constant Succession, to inculcate his Laws upon them, to admonish them of their Enormities, and to call them to Repentance. This was a grievous aggravation of their disobedience, that they persisted in it after such incessant pains to reclaim them, while the commands of one Man, who was originally none of the stock of *Abraham*, but a Proselyte, and had been dead some ages before, were still held sacred by his Family, and honoured by all his Posterity with an inviolable Obedience.

FOR this *Jonadab* the Son of *Rechab* is the same we read of 2 Kings x. to whom *Je-hu* said, *Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord*; and he took him along with him in his Chariot, when he went to destroy the Prophets of *Baal*. And this was about three hundred Years before this Passage here recorded of his Posterity, which happened in the days of *Je-ho-ja-kim* the Son of *Josiah*, King of *Judah*, pretty near the time of the *Babylonian Captivity*.

THAT the House of *Rechab* were but Proselytes and Sojourners in the Tribe of *Judah*, appears from 1 Chron. ii. ult. where *Hemath* the *Kenite* is said to be the Father of the House of *Rechab*. And the Father of these *Kenites* was *Hobab* the Son of *Jethro*, *Moses's* Father-in-Law, who had friendly correspondence with *Israel* in the Wilderness, and upon *Moses's* invitation accompanied them into the Land of *Canaan*, and afterwards sojourned in the Tribe of *Judah*, as we learn Judges i. 16. Though indeed the *Kenites* in general are represented as ancient Friends to the House of *Israel*, 1 Sam. xv. 6.

NOW this was a flagrant aggravation of the Sin of *Judah*, that the Sons of a Proselyte should pay more deference to the commands of their deceased

Progenitor, than *Judah* paid to the Admonitions of God and all his Prophets.

AND what were the commands of *Jonadab* to his Family? They were prohibitions of things generally useful and necessary; that they should drink no Wine, build no Houses, plant no Vineyards nor Fields, for themselves, their Wives, or Children, for ever. No doubt but this wise and good Man, (as the Sacred History, 2 *Kings* x. represents him) saw sufficient reason for these injunctions. But however, our own human nature will teach us, that his Off-spring, in the course of several Ages, must endure many hardships by reason of these Curbs and Restraints. To be debarred the use of Wine in all cases of Faintness and Infirmitiy, seems prejudicial to the Constitution: To be exposed in Tents to the inclemency of Wind and Weather at all Seasons, and in all accidents of Storm and Tempest, may seem hazardous, especially to sick People and young Children.

AND yet these methods of living were not without ancient Example and Authority; for the Patriarchs dwelt in Tents, and so did the *Kenites* long before the days of *Jonadab*, as we learn from the History of *Jael* the Wife of *Heber the Kenite*, in the Book of *Judges*; and it was of old, and still is, a piece of Religion in many Eastern Countries to abstain from Wine; which was forbidden no doubt in consideration both of the strong Temptations, and dangerous consequences of drinking it intemperately in those hot Countries. It was indeed an Extream, but it was an Extream on the safer side, wholly to prohibit it.

HOWEVER, the *Rechabites* governed themselves in these particulars upon a principle of Obedience to the paternal authority of their Ancestor. And for

this they have the high praise and approbation of God himself, who engages to bless and prosper them for ever upon this very account.

WHENCE we may observe these three things.

I. THAT in Matters of an indifferent Nature, which God has neither commanded nor forbidden, the Determinations of human Authority shall be binding to all those who are in a state of Subjection, and live under that Authority.

II. THAT Obedience to such Determinations is highly pleasing to God.

III. THAT it is a special Argument and Motive to obey the more express and immediate Commands of God.

AND, I. We learn from this Passage, that Obedience is due to Parents and Governours in things which God has not commanded. It is enough that he has not forbidden them. That leaves room for the discretionary Power and Directions of Superiors.

AND such a Power is absolutely necessary for the Government of the World. For it is not possible for any Laws of God or Man to comprehend all the Circumstances of human Actions. We must be content with general Rules: Children must obey their Parents, Servants their Masters, Subjects their Governors, not only in easy, but hard Cases; not only in things that are usual and fashionable, but in things of a singular and extraordinary Nature, if they please to command them. We know the danger of an Ambassador's exceeding his Commission, though it may prove for the good of his King and Country; or of a subordinate Officer's disobeying the Orders of his Superior, though it were to do better. And there is a famous Passage in the *Roman History* of a General\* who executed

[\* T. Manlius Torquatus. *vid. Liv. lib. viii.*]

his

his own Son in the face of his Army, for fighting the Enemy contrary to his Orders, though he had obtained a notable Victory. But this great Man thought no Victory a sufficient Compensation for the ill Example, and bad Consequences of Disobedience. How wisely did King *Saul* reckon he had interpreted the Divine Command of utterly destroying the *Amalekites*, with all that belonged to them, so as to spare of the best of the Flocks and the Herds for a Sacrifice to the Lord? But observe the Prophet's Resolution of this Case, *1 Sam. xv. 22.* *Hath the Lord as great Delight in burnt Offerings and Sacrifices, as in obeying the Voice of the Lord? Bebold, to obey is better than Sacrifice, and to hearken than the Fat of Rams. For Rebellion is as the Sin of Witchcraft, and Stubbornness as Iniquity and Idolatry.*

THESE things shew the sacred Esteem which God and Man have for Obedience. They will not allow those to whom the Command is given, to accommodate it to their own Opinions and Humours. We think we see much Inconvenience in the Restraints laid upon the *Rechabites*, and perhaps the Wisdom of God saw more; but he meddles not with that, but applauds the Obedience. He looks not at the Discretion of the Father, but the Virtue of the Children. Supposing them to have been wiser than their Father, it was no proper Subject for them to shew their Subtlety, and distinguish away the Hardships of their Duty. Their Wisdom was to obey.

IT is true, as to any Law of God, it was as free for these Men to drink Wine, build Houses, and plant Vineyards, as it was for the Tribe of *Judah* where they dwelt. What a multitude of Reasons would our People have found out, to have reconciled their Duty

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to these Advantages? However low the Credit of the old Schoolmen is sunk amongst us, yet Distinctions abound to shift off the Yoke of human Impositions. It is thought Objection enough against them, that they are no where to be found in the Word of God. *Where hath he required them at our Hands?* Why even in this, that he requires us to obey our Superiors: 1 Pet. ii. 13. *Submit your selves to every Ordinance of Man for the Lord's sake.* Let those who think it a high Attainment in them to set themselves above such Ordinances, observe how, at the same time, they set themselves above the Word of God.

WHEN the all-wise Legislator was framing the fifth Precept of the Decalogue, can we imagine that he did not consider Children as well as Parents, Subjects as well as Governours: and that he did not know that the Understandings and Passions of those in Authority would lead them sometimes to make hard Laws and severe Rules? Yet he has given a general Precept to honour, i. e. obey them; and I know of no Exception in all his Word, upon the score of any Hardship or Inconvenience.

WHAT busines has Religion with this or that mode of Living, manner of Diet, or fashion in our Habitations? Certainly none at all. *Every Creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving.* We may freely partake of them all with Moderation and Temperance, so long as we are at our own Choice and Disposal. But if those who have the Command over us, think fit to prescribe us any Restraints, we are bound to observe them, and must govern ourselves by their Limitations; or else there is no Meaning in the words of my Text.

SUCH

SUCH Commands alter the Nature of indifferent Things, and make them become Matters of Necessity and Duty. And this happens in a thousand Instances of common Life. It is naturally lawful for every Man to exercise an honest Employment in any Place, wherever he can gain the greatest Advantages by it. But the Laws of Cities and Societies (which are only of human Institution) shall restrain him from doing this among them, 'till he has qualified himself by their Laws. The Justice of this is no where disputed, not even by the greatest Zealots against human Impositions.

THE grand Mistake in these Cases, is this, that People think it safe for them to disobey the Commands of their Superiors, when they can either do it without being discovered, or do not incur human Penalties by it. And this is the Occasion of much Disobedience in Children; that their Parents many times cannot prove their Faults, or else are too tender or too feeble to punish them. And if they can behave themselves with tolerable Reverence towards Parents, while they are under their immediate Care and Government, they think they have compleated their Obedience, and are discharged from any farther Observance of Commands when once they are grown up, and removed to some distance.

BUT the great Examples of Obedience in my Text, had larger Notions of this Duty, and did not think the Will of their Fore-father vacated by his Death, nor antiquated by the space of three hundred Years; but owned it, and observed it with all the Hardships attending it, as much as if he had been still living, and they in the state of Infancy. This God approves in them, and promises to reward them for it. Which brings me to the

*11d* Observation I proposed, THAT Obedience to the Determinations of our Governors, in things otherwise of an indifferent Nature, is highly pleasing to God.

WHEN the Necessaries and Accommodations of Life are all left to our Choice without Exception, we may freely make a moderate Use of such of them as we like best, without any Offence to the supreme Donor. It is equal to him whether we drink Wine or other kind of Liquors, whether we build our Houses, or wear our Clothes after this or that Fashion. There is neither moral good nor evil in such Circumstances. But if our Parents, our Guides and Governors lay a Restraint upon us in any of these things, whatever they prohibit becomes thenceforth as unlawful to us, as the Tree of Knowledge in Paradise; not for any intrinsic Evil in it, but by virtue of the Interdict laid upon it by those who are unto us in God's stead, and whom we are to hear and regard, as if God did immediately speak to us.

NOT that we are bound to esteem the Determinations of fallible Men to be as wise and good, as if they came from God's own Mouth; nor are we obliged to wink so hard as not to see an obvious Defect or Excess in some human Injunctions, nor to be so insensible as not to feel a Hardship, and dutifully to apply for the Redress of it. Men may know these Imperfections in the Ordinances of Men, and yet obey them with Modesty and Respect; for God knows them, and yet he owns the Authority by which they are appointed, and commands it to be obeyed.

I do think, and I may think it without Prejudice to sacred Writ, or the Character of this holy Man, that God himself would not have laid such Restraints

upon

upon the *Rechabites* as their Ancestor did. For I do not believe that good Men were acted by Divine Impulse in these indifferent things. It is not *Jonadab* whom God praises for these Injunctions, but his Posteriority for their strict religious Observance of his Authority.

AND so it is in all Governments, Military or Civil; the Sovereign supports the Authority of his subordinate Officers. If he gives any of them a discretionary Power over any District, he will punish the People of such District for disobeying his Officer, though he might not manage things so well and wisely as the Sovereign himself would have done.

AND therefore God, the supreme Governour of all, delights in our Obedience to those whom he hath set in Authority over us, though he knows they are but Men, of like Passions and Infirmities with our selves. And he has given large Demonstrations of his Pleasure in such Obedience, by blessing it, as he here promises in my Text, so long as ever it lasts, not only in particular Families, but in whole Nations and Kingdoms. In his own People first, whose Prosperity may plainly be seen to have kept time with their Obedience to their Princes, Priests, and Prophets. And next in the *Pagan* Monarchies of the World, which all in their several Turns attained to their Grandeur and Glory by a strict Discipline; and lost it again by the Relaxation and Decay of it. And I might appeal to the very *Mahometans* at this Day, who however absurd in their Religion and Laws, yet have raised and maintained themselves hitherto in a formidable Greatness, by a strict and ready Execution of the Commands of their Superiors. But I hasten to the

Third and last Thing I proposed, which was to shew, what a good Argument and Motive this sort of Obedience is, to our doing the more special and express Will of God.

AND St. *Paul* argues very properly and strongly from this Topick, *Heb.* xii. 9. that if we once have a just Sense of our Duty to our Parents according to the Flesh, much more reason shall we see to yield Obedience to the Father of Spirits, who is the Fountain of Life and Happiness, and can command us nothing but what is highly conducive thereunto. If we learn to bear this domestick Yoke of Discipline in Childhood and Youth, we shall be the more easy under Christ's Yoke in our Manhood and advanced Years. Obedience to the Fifth Commandment is the first Thing that we have to learn, and it is a good Foundation for all the rest. We cannot doubt but the Family in my Text, so celebrated for this, had a proportionable Piety in all other Respects. We may often see it in our own Experience; at least we cannot help seeing its contrary. How monstrous and aukward was the Religion of those Men amongst us in the Days of our Forefathers, who threw off all Obedience, nay made it even a Merit and a Duty to violate and trample upon every Ordinance of Man? And the Poison was so rank, and has so spread its Infection even down to our own times, that that Part of our Catechism which teaches *to submit to Governors, Teachers, Spiritual Pastors and Masters*, is left to little Children at petty Schools; very few of our Flocks thinking themselves one jot more obliged by any Admonitions or Exhortations of their Shepherd, I will not say to submit to him in things of his own prescribing, but even in those general and publick Duties of our Religion, without

without which we cannot be Christians: Although we say all that Christ and the Prophets and Apostles have said, to convince them of the Necessity of such Obedience. True it is, that when earthly Powers command any thing which is contrary to plain moral Virtue, or the express Word of God, then all who are under their Authority, are exempted from active Obedience by that infallible Rule, *That it is meet to obey God rather than Man.* And by this Rule all holy Martyrs and Confessors for Religion are justified. But then we must be very sure that there is an Opposition between the Will of God and Man, before we venture to disobey Parents, Masters, and lawful Governours. Our own Scruples or private Interpretations of difficult Scriptures, or Wisdom in seeing a better Way than our Governours direct, is no sufficient Warrant for such Disobedience. It is too well known amongst us, that innumerable Mischiefs, Disorders, and Impieties have been occasioned by such Pretences. And I question whether in any thing God has been more highly provoked, and his sacred Laws more confidently trampled upon, than by an ignorant, or wilful perverting of this Rule, *That we should obey God rather than Man;* which though most excellent in its genuine Sense and Meaning, yet has been most horribly abused to countenance all the Rebellion, Contumacy, and Contempt of Authority in the World.

GOD, who is the Fountain of Authority and good Government, has constituted various Orders of Angels and Men, appointing some to command, and others to obey: And the confounding of these Orders has been the Occasion of Rebellion in Heaven and Earth. It is the infernal Spark which has kindled Civil Wars in Kingdoms, and Hatred, Variance, and

Strife in private Families. For if we look about us, we shall find, that those who have been the greatest Opposers of the Magistrates and Ministers under whom they have lived, have generally had most Trouble in the Management of their own domestick Affairs, and been soundly mortified with the rebellious Manners of their own Children. And that not only by the just judgment of God, but even by the natural and necessary Course of their own Conduct. For the Example of their own insolent and contemptuous Carriage towards their Governours, destroys in their Children all Reverence and Respect both towards themselves and others.

TO conclude then ; Let every one, who is desirous to maintain his own Station and Dignity in the World, render unto all men that share of Honour and Respect which is due to their Persons, Professions, or Conditions of what sort soever. For there can be no fear of God, where there is no regard of man : and Children who were never taught reverence to their Parents, will hardly shew any to Magistrates and Ministers. But those who have been accustomed to the yoke of good discipline in their tender years, are most likely to become instruments of honour to God, and benefit and comfort to all their Relations, Friends, and Neighbours ; through the Grace and Blessing of Jesus Christ, to whom &c.





# SERMON LXXX.

*On the Fifteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*

E V E N I N G.

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J E R. xxxvi. 32.

*Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah, all the words of the Book which Jeboiakim king of Judah had burnt in the fire; and there were added besides unto them many like words.*

 **H**E Prophet *Jeremiah* had preached many Sermons to the house of *Judah*, but to no manner of purpose; he was not a right court chaplain, I mean in the eye of the world, and according to the fashions and manners of men: But in deed and reality he was the very best they had, being of God's own appointing, on purpose to have saved them from destruction, if they would but have hearkened to him.

NOW since the discourses and warnings which he had spoken to them from the mouth of God were nothing

regarded, it was the pleasure and command of the most High, that he should collect them all together, and commit them to writing, and cause them to be read to the people in the most frequented place, and upon the most publick occasion, to see if they would make such impressions on them, as might convert them from their evil ways, and restore them to their obedience of God's Law, and so prevent that captivity, which was ready to swallow them up as the punishment of their sins.

ACCORDINGLY the Prophet called *Baruch*, whom he employed to write for him, and dictated to him all the words of the prophecy which God had spoken to him from the beginning to that time, against *Israel*, such of them as remained after the conquest of *Salmaneser*, and against *Judah*, and against all the Nations round about. All this *Baruch* wrote from the mouth of *Jeremiah* upon a roll of parchment, which was the fashion of the Books of those times.

WHEN this was done, the Prophet told the Scribe, that this writing must be read in the house of the Lord. ' For my own part, says he, I am under such circumstances as hinder me from going thither.' If any should desire to know what it was which withheld the Prophet from going, it is not easy to assign the reason. At first view it looks as if he were a state-prisoner; and so he was afterwards under *Zedekiah*; but some following passages of this Chapter will hardly allow us to conclude that he was imprisoned at this time under *Jeboiakim*. For first, it is said, ver. 19. that when the Princes of *Judah* had heard the words of the Prophecy, and undertook to report them to the King, they kindly precautioned

*Baruch*,

Baruch, saying, *Go you and Jeremiah and hide your selves, and let no man know where ye be.* And when the King had heard them, and in great displeasure commanded his officers to arrest the Prophet and his Scribe, it is said that *the Lord bid them.* But now if *Jeremiah* had been a state-prisoner at this time, there had been no need of giving orders to look out for him and take him up. So that we cannot think he was under this sort of confinement, but restrained from going abroad, either by some bodily infirmity or legal impediment, which to us must remain a secret.

*BARUCH* therefore at *Jeremiah's* request went up to the Temple on a fast-day, which 'tis probable was kept for imploring the divine Mercy and assistance against the arms of the *Chaldeans*. Upon this occasion it was proper to read the roll, because the assembly of worshippers was greater than usual, and because the present distress would dispose their hearts to take deeper impressions from what they should hear of the divine Warnings. But whether this prophecy was read only at one, or at two several fasts, is somewhat doubtful: And the doubt arises from the two different times here mentioned. For first, God commanded the Prophet to do this in the fourth year of *Jeboiakim*; and he seems to have gone presently about it. Again, ver. 9. it is said that it was read in the fifth year of *Jeboiakim* and ninth month; which has inclined some Interpreters to think, that there were two publick readings of this roll. But we will let this pass, and come to that which is certain. *Baruch* was directed to read it in the Temple, and the place in the Temple where he stood to read, was the chamber of *Gemariah* the son of *Shaphan* the Scribe, who fa-

voured him with a standing at the door or window of his chamber, which looking out into the courts of the Temple, and being raised above them, was a very commodious situation, from whence he might be heard by the large congregation of people, who were gathered thereabout.

WHEN he had done reading the roll, *Micaiah* the son of *Gemariah*, who stood by, and heard every thing, went away directly to the King's palace, to the Scribe's chamber, or Secretary's office there, and declared amongst several of the nobility there present, what he had heard at the Temple. Whereupon they sent one of their officers to call *Baruch*, and bid him bring his roll with him. Forthwith he came along with the messenger, and at their request read over the prophecy to them. When they had heard the calamities of war and captivity which were threatned in it, as ready to fall upon them, they were very much affrighted, and told *Baruch* they would acquaint the King with the contents of his writing, to know his opinion about it, and how far he was disposed to follow the directions of it: And till that was known, they advised *Baruch* and the Prophet to keep out of the way, lest the King should be offended at them, and seek to punish them, as men that stirred up sedition among the people.

HAVING thus dismiss *Baruch*, they laid up his roll in the Secretary's office, and presently went in to the King, and gave him an account of what had passed both at the Temple and in their hearing; letting him know withal that they had the roll in their custody. When *Jeboiakim* heard this, he sent one of them, *Jehudi*, to fetch it, and ordered him to read it over to him. And when he had heard three or four Chapters

of it, he took a penknife, and cut it in picces, and threw [it into the fire piecemeal, till he had burnt every line of it. At which impious action, none of the company rent their garments, as it was usual in such cases: Only three of them interceded with the King, that he would have spared the roll, but when he had destroyed it, they were easy, and shewed no farther concern about it.

AND now orders were issued forth, and proclamation made, that if any one knew where *Jeremiah* and *Baruch* were, they should seize them and bring them to justice, as traitors to the King, and enemies to the Commonwealth: But God was their Protector, so that no man was able to hurt them. And he commanded the Prophet to expostulate with *Jehoiakim* for burning his roll, and to write another immediately, wherein he was to repeat the former denunciations against King and People, and to add besides several others to them.

AND this is all which *Jehoiakim* got by burning the prophecy of *Jeremiah*, wherein he betrayed the weakness of all wicked men, in putting the evil day far from him. If indeed he could have truly said, *The danger is over as soon as this is burnt; or the burning of this will save Jerusalem from the fire of the Chaldeans*, he might have gloried in what he had done. But then with how cheap a sacrifice might all wicked men atone the divine Wrath, and prevent their punishment? Not by amending their lives, but by abolishing the Ministry of God's word, and not suffering the man to come near them, who should dare to bring them a threatening message in his name. Is not this a poor delusory way of giving ease to an evil conscience? And yet this is the best means which

sinners commonly take for their present security, to keep their eyes from seeing, and their ears from hearing every thing which shews them the danger of their ways.

THIS is what provoked *Jehoiakim* to cut *Ba-ruch's* roll in pieces and throw it into the fire, because here his picture was drawn, and shown to himself and his people in such features as were true indeed, but very deformed and disagreeable. Let us turn back to chap. xxii. which made part of this roll, and there we have the Prophet addressing himself to this King by name, and telling him that he was commanded of God to reprove him for his oppression, violence, and shedding of innocent blood; and that he was so intent upon the pursuit of his lusts, that he could not turn away from them, tho' it were to save himself and his whole Kingdom. He tells him that God put it to his choice, whether he would establish his throne in righteousness, by executing Judgment and Justice upon it, or persist in his evil ways, and so bring himself to the *burial of an ass*; which the Prophet foretold would be the end of his present doings; and so it came to pass. For being taken by the *Chaldeans*, as they were carrying him captive to *Babylon*, he died by the way, and they would not stand to bury him, but threw his body into a ditch, where it lay exposed to the heat by day, and to the frost by night, as the Prophet had seen it in his divine Vision.

THIS was the reward of his shedding innocent blood, particularly the blood of *Urijah* the Prophet, who lived in his reign, and prophesied in the same style, and of the same things with *Jeremiah*. This Minister of God, *Jehoiakim* pursued with a resolution

to

to take away his life: Which *Urijah* being aware of, arose and fled into *Egypt*, thinking there to find a place of refuge. But *Jeboiakim* being in friendship with the *Egyptian* King, had intimation of him, and sent and fetched him thence, and slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people. For a recompence of which cruelty, his alliance with the *Egyptian* turned to his destruction, and his own dead body was cast out like the brutes, upon the face of the Earth, without any mourning or funeral rites bestowed upon it.

NOR did his punishment end in his own person, but was extended to his posterity. Our Prophet in the said xxii chap. styles his son *Jeconiah*, *a despised broken idol, a vessel wherein is no pleasure. He and his mother, says Jeremiah, shall be cast out into another country where they were not born, and there shall they die.* This was fulfilled to a tittle; for we read 2 Kings xxiv. that when *Nebuchadnezzar* came against *Jerusalem*, *Jeconiah* went out to him, and surrendred himself, his mother, servants, nobles, and officers: And *Nebuchadnezzar* took them and carried them away to *Babylon*, from whence they never returned. *Lastly, the Prophet closes the fore-mentioned Chapter with an exterminating sentence passed upon Jeboiakim's whole family. Write him childless, says he, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.*

NOW this, I say, this part of the roll, the xxii chap. of *Jeremiah*, was that which touched *Jeboiakim* to the quick, and made him abhor this writing, and throw it into the fire, that so, if possible, no eye might ever see, nor ear hear any more of it. For tho'

tho' there were other passages in it, which were full of God's wrath against the iniquities of the times, yet they were thrown amongst sinners in general; or if they were pointed at any one in particular, yet they were below the royal family. But this xxii chap. is an express message to *Jeboiakim* and his family by name, and it is wholly employed in setting forth the impieties of their lives, and the direful calamities of their deaths: For which reasons *Jeboiakim* was extremely moved at the reading of it.

AND I cannot blame him for being moved at things of so much moment and concern to him and his. For it paints him out as a man loaded with the guilt of enormous sins, and just ready to receive the stroke of divine Vengeance for the punishment of them. Which must needs be a scene of terror, when lively represented, to the highest upon Earth. But his fault lay, in directing his passion to improper objects, and giving a wrong turn to his indignation. He raged against the word of God, and the Prophet who was the Messenger of it; when he should have descended into himself, and have compared the deformities of his soul, with the description given of them. Was the description plain, and without any mixture of flattery? He knew, or might know, that God was the author of it, who was not to flatter his creatures, but to speak like their Lord and Judge, in a plain and free style. As to the Prophet, he had no reason to be angry at him; for he knew him to be no more than the conveyance, by whose tongue the words were spoken, and who was obliged by his office neither to add to them, nor diminish from them. He should have considered, that every man of an ingenuous mind, and most of all a King, should be always ready

ready to see his own faults, and esteem it as the greatest degree of royal virtue, to conquer himself and triumph over his own sinful lusts and passions; no more enduring such blemishes in himself, than he would have perpetual spots and clouds to eclipse the Light of the World.

IF *Jeboiakim* had been innocent of the pride, and oppression, sensuality, and neglects of Government which are here charged upon him; if, according to the word of God by *Amos*, v. 24. *he had caused judgment to run down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream* to visit all the corners of his dominions, to refresh the poor, the fatherless, and the widow, to nourish the virtues of sobriety and temperance, of chastity and modesty, of merciful dealing, mutual forbearance, just weights and measures among his people; if this had been his known aim and endeavour, who durst have writ such a roll as is here before us? Who durst have brought it into the Temple and the Palace, and have read it in the ears of Princes and People? He who should have presumed to do this, would quickly have felt the hand of God and man against him, he would have been justly accounted a firebrand from the infernal pit, an instrument of the father of lies, one who had confidence enough to outface the Sun at noon-day. *Jeboiakim* would securely have despised his threatenings, as having done nothing to deserve them; and he would have served himself most effectually of his roll, not by cutting it in pieces, but by causing it to be read publickly in all the Cities of his Kingdom, that his people who were happy under his Government, might see how grossly it was defamed, and might detest the authors of such infamy. Or if *Jeboiakim*, being guilty of the charge,

had

had been awakened by it to look about him, had received it as a summons from Heaven to call him to repentance, had set about comparing his ways with it, and finding them very wrong, had resolved to rectify them by the strait line of God's Law; even so he would not have abolished this roll, but have kept it by him as his faithful monitor, and have read it often, that it might alarm him, and stir up his spirit to do all that was directed for the preservation of himself and his people.

BUT when he cuts and burns it, he acts the desperate man, who was conscious of the iniquities laid to his charge, but resolved not to amend them. And herein he made good that other part of his character given him in this roll, xxii. 21. *I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, said God, but thou saidst, I will not bear: this hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice.* Jehoiakim was much such a Governoür as that Gallio, whom we read of *Act* xviii. who could see justice violated at his very Tribunal, and pass it over without any concern. His eyes and his heart were so entirely turned to the pursuit of his ambitious and covetous designs, as the Prophet tells him, to be very rich, and very stately, that he was not at leisure to see how justice lay bleeding in every vein all over his Kingdom; nor to hear how God was blasphemed and all goodness outraged by the tongues of drunkards, atheists, libertines of all sorts, in every street and corner of his City.

IT was not for nothing therefore that God had doomed him to be buried like an ass when he was dead, for he had the stupidity and indolence of that creature while he was living. *Tho' the Babylonians were knocking at his gates, and tho' the Prophet told*

told him their business was to ravage his City, and carry him into captivity ; yet nothing could awaken him to see that his corruptions had brought all this upon him ; nothing could prevail with him to leave his sensual delights and vanities, and apply his heart to a serious reformation and repentance, which was the only way to reconcile himself to God, and obtain help from him against his enemies. But when a scheme of reformation was brought to him from the dictates of the Spirit of God, and the necessity of executing it speedily was enforced by the present distress ; instead of practising it, he threw it into the fire, and at the same time cast away all farther thought or concern about it.

BUT alas ! what a wild and senseless expedient was this, to make himself easy ! If he questioned whether the message contained in this roll, were really the word of God, he should have taken the pains to compare it with such books as were acknowledged to be the Law and the Prophets : And he should have perused the Histories of the Kings who went before him, and have learned from thence how God had dealt both with the observers and the transgressors of those sacred rules ; and what it was which God had formerly complained of, and how it was reformed so as to pacify his anger. If *Jeboiakim* had acted thus, he had done well. But this is to suppose him to be a man capable of serious thinking, who, tho' he had gone wrong for a time, yet had sense enough to quit his evil ways, when he saw the danger of them ; whereas this man was only fit to fill the throne of a Kingdom which was near its dissolution, and to be at the head of a people who were ripe for destruction.

HOWEVER, his conduct has produced for us the useful lesson in the words of my Text, That the highest power upon Earth cannot destroy the word of God; for tho' the hand of man may abolish the Books and Records of it, yet shall they be restored again, to expose the vanity of such an attempt, to glorify him who is higher than the highest, and to make known his whole will to the children of men. *Jehoiakim* burnt the prophecy of *Jeremiah*, and yet we have it entire at this day. Many other enemies of God's Church, as great as he, have burnt that and the rest of our sacred Books since that time, and yet how numerous are they at this day, in those very Cities and Places where they were once burnt? This brings to my mind those passages of that very word, which bid defiance to all that men and devils can do against it. As First, that of *Solomon*, *There are many devices in the heart of man, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord that shall stand.* Secondly, that of *Isaiah* xl. 8. *Man is but as grass which withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever.* Thirdly, Those sayings of our Lord, that *not one jot or tittle of the Law or the Prophets shall fail, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and Earth shall pass away, says he, but my word shall not pass away. I have built my Church upon such a rock, that all the powers of hell shall not be able to prevail against it.*

BUT what pains do they incur who fight against the truth of God, and endeavour to quench the light of it? Suppose they can for a while banish it from their own habitations, can they cancel the Records of God in Heaven, which he keeps of every man's words and deeds, whereby he shall be judged? Can they draw such an universal blot over the register of their own

own conscience, that it shall not rise up in judgment against them and accuse them? Observe what God says to *Ezekiel*, chap. ii. *Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, impudent children and stiff-hearted: and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God. And they, whether they will bear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them.* ‘ They can stop their ears against their *Isaiahs, Jeremiahs, Eze-kiels*, they can sacrifice their persons, they can burn their Books: But they cannot hinder me from justifying my dealings with them to all the world, by making it known that I have raised up such Prophets among them, and how by their Ministry I have abundantly warned them to refuse the evil and chuse the good. They can never be able to blot it out of their memories, but must acknowledge upon occasion, that I have sent such Prophets among them. And consequently they shall have no unrighteousness to charge upon me at the last day, when I shall make it appear, that I did not visit and punish them, without first giving them sufficient warning by such Prophets. Let them be impenitent as they will, yet they and all the world shall know that I have done my part by sending my Prophets among them.’

TO the same purpose does our great Prophet, our Lord *Jesus Christ*, speak to his hearers. *The word that I have given you, the same shall judge you at the last day.* ‘ You may tear my Gospels, you may blaspheme my Miracles, but they shall be imputed to you, as means proper to have converted you, and led you to repentance. I shall make it appear, that I have done such works amongst you, as were never done

‘ before;

‘ before ; such as would have saved even *Sodom* and  
‘ *Gomorrah*, had they been wrought among them. If  
‘ they have no good effect upon you, yet they shall not  
‘ fall to the ground, they shall turn to your greater  
‘ condemnation, and the divine Justice shall triumph,  
‘ and be glorified in taking the sorer vengeance on  
‘ you for your grosser infidelity.’

WHEN *Jeremiah* and *Baruch* writ over the second roll, they were directed by God to add several things to it which were not in before: Aggravations no doubt of *Jeboiakim*’s punishment for his impious burning of the first roll. And very just it was that his doom should be aggravated. For shall every abuse of temporal blessings be imputed, as it certainly shall, to wicked men, to enflame their reckoning at the last day ; and shall spiritual wantonness and intemperance be overlooked, and escape such imputation? If so, then the supreme Judge would not observe that adequate measure and proportion, which we are sure he will be found at the last day to have held in all his dispensations.

WHAT needs more to be said to admonish us all to set a watch, a guard over our hearts and tongues, that we be not blasphemers of God’s holy Name, hinderers or slanderers of his Word, despisers and scorners of his sacred Ordinances? Since every blasphemy, contempt and scoff shall add to the heat of our furnace, and the number of our stripes. Wo be to such as laugh in this manner now, for they shall bitterly mourn and weep. Let us not turn the grace of God into wantonness, and push back the overtures of salvation, as if it were unworthy of our acceptance. Let us behave our selves with that gravity and reverence which may speak our sense of the divine Presence

fence and Inspection over us, and with that esteem of God's holy Word and Sacraments, as may convince the world that we believe them to be the means of everlasting life, and are truly thankful for them, and are seriously preparing our selves by them to be received at the end of our days to a nearer communion with the God of all wisdom, holiness, and truth, thro' the merits of his Son *Jesus Christ* our Lord, to whom &c.





# SERMON LXXXI.

*On the Sixteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*

M O R N I N G.

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E Z E K. ii. 7.

*And thou shalt speak my Words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, for they are most rebellious.*

**E**ZKIEL the Priest, the Son of Buzi, of the Family of Aaron, was cotemporary with Jeremiah, for he prophesied in the fifth year of the Captivity of Jeboiachin, Grandson of Josiah King of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away Captive into Chaldea, several years before the Destruction of Jerusalem, together with many thousands of the People, among whom the Prophet Ezekiel was one, whose Habitation was allotted him near the River Chebar, a River which rises in the borders of Armenia the greater, and runs through Mesopotamia into the River Euphrates; near the confluence of these Rivers it seems the Prophet had his residence. From this place he was convey'd in a vision to Jerusalem, and there shewn

all the several sorts of Idolatry which the Inhabitants of that City committed, together with a Revelation of the Punishments which God was about to inflict upon them for such Abominations. At the same time he promises those of the Captivity who steadfastly and faithfully adhered to the true Religion, that God would be their Sanctuary in this strange Land, and bring them back again in due time to their native Country, and there cause them to flourish in Peace and Righteousness, as in former times. All which the Prophet declared to the *Jews* that were Captives in *Chaldea*, among whom he dwelt.

IN the figure of his Vision he sets forth God as sitting upon a Throne supported by four Cherubims, holding forth with his right hand the Scepter of Mercy and Peace to all those Worshippers who are sprinkled with the blood of the unspotted Lamb; and brandishing with his other hand the Sword of Divine vengeance over the heads of all idolatrous and ungodly People.

HE notes notwithstanding the monstrous perverseness of the People of *Israel*, who though they above all Nations had seen the hands of the divine Majesty stretched out, both for their Protection and their Punishment, according to their various demerits, yet so prone were they to be seduced by their false Prophets, by their own Lusts, and by the dumb Idols of the Heathen, that they would rush upon Sword, Famine, Pestilence, and Captivity, rather than hearken to the loud and manifest warnings of the Lord their God.

SUCH are they represented to be in the words of my Text, which contains two things worthy our consideration.

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I. THE manifestation of God's goodness in sending his Prophets and Ministers, to instruct his People in the knowledge of his Ways and the works of his Commandments.

II. THE unworthy contempts and affronts which men commonly put upon such Ministry.

And *If*, THE ordinary way which God provided for the instruction of his People, in the duties of Religion, was this. He caused his Laws to be written in Books, and put into the hands of Masters of Families; so that from what we read in Sacred Writ, we may reasonably conclude that no Family was without the five Books of *Moses*; and many no doubt had other Pious Books, as we have at this day. As to the Decalogue, and other parts of the Divine Law, there are very strict injunctions upon Parents, *Deut. vi.* to be continually teaching and instilling them into their Children, morning and evening, at home and abroad. These Laws they are commanded to write upon the doors and gates of their Houses, and to peruse them as constantly as if they were signets upon their hands and frontlets between their eyes. This shews how much the Masters of Families were bound to teach every one his Household the Commandments, Statutes and Judgments of the Lord their God.

BUT besides this private method of teaching, we may observe that the Priests and *Levites* were dispersed through all the Tribes of *Israel*, of whom *Moses* says, *Deut. xxxiii.* *they shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy Laws:* And the Prophet *Malachi* says, *ii. 7.* *That the Priest's lips should keep knowledge, and that the People should seek the Law at his mouth;* for he is the *Messenger of the Lord of Hosts.*

Whence

Whence it appears, that the Priests and *Levites* were appointed, not only to offer Sacrifices and perform other services at the Tabernacle and Temple, but likewise to read and explain the Word of God to the People in their several Towns and Cities, and to stir them up by proper Exhortations to the Observance of it. This Ministry was certainly a branch of the Priests Office; which when they neglected, God complained of them by his Prophets, that *his People perished for want of that knowledge of his Laws*, which it was their Part and Duty to teach them, or were corrupted by the false glosses which they put upon his Word, and the ill example which they set them.

WHAT Places they had for publick Teaching, besides the Tabernacle and Temple, we have not any certain information before the *Babylonian Captivity*, because we have no *Rabbinical* Writers extant before that time. But two things we are certain of.

1st, THAT if the Priests and *Levites* had been confined to teach Religion no where but at one certain place, such as the Tabernacle or Temple, they would have been able to do very little good this way among the many thousands of *Israel*, many of whom could but rarely in their whole Life resort to these places, by reason of necessary business, infirmities, and their great distance from the Metropolis. So that the Tribe of *Levi* could have been but of small use to them, if they had not been permitted to teach People in some convenient places, nigh their respective Habitations; as no doubt they might, for the reason of teaching makes this necessary, and we nowhere find any prohibition to the contrary. Indeed the Sacred Writers express a dislike of the Groves and High Places which were used for Divine Wor-

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ship: but the reason of their dislike was, either because the People who frequented those places, built Altars and offered Sacrifice and other Offerings there, which by the Law might be offered no where but at the Temple; or else because their Teachers invaded the Office, without being appointed by a sufficient Authority. But if they were duly appointed, and medled not with the Offerings peculiar to the Temple, nor hindered people from resorting to it at the prescribed Seasons, they might pray and teach in such Places, without offending against any Law.

2. IT is said, *Psal. lxxiv. 8.* that the Enemies of *Israel* had burnt up all the Houses of God in the Land. Now that Psalm appears, by many passages in it, to have been composed by *Asaph*, a descendent no doubt, and of the same Family with former Holy Men of that Name, in contemplation of the havock made of *Jerusalem* and all *Judea* by the *Chaldeans*. And the passage I have quoted is authority sufficient for us to affirm, that the *Jews* of those times had other places beside the Temple, for publick Assemblies to pray together, and hear the Word of God.

AFTER their return from *Babylon*, these places were known by the name of *Synagogues*, a *Greek* word introduced by the *Hellenistick Jews*, who read the Scriptures in the Version of the *LXX*. And these *Synagogues* were so frequent in *Jewry*, that it was customary to erect one in every place, where there were ten persons of full Age, and such plentiful Circumstances, as to be always at leisure to attend the service of it. And in populous Cities their number was proportioned to the exigences of the People, particularly in *Tiberias*, Jewish Writers tell us there were twelve, and in *Jerusalem* four hundred and eighty.

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THE Services to be performed in these Synagogues were Prayers, reading the Scriptures, and preaching and expounding upon them. Their Prayers were common prescribed forms, few at first, but afterwards extended to a large Number: eighteen of them were very ancient, used no doubt in our Saviour's time; and consequently he joyned in them with the rest of the *Jews*, whenever he went into their Synagogues, as he always did every Sabbath Day.

THE other parts of their Service were reading, expounding and preaching upon Holy Scripture. They expounded as they read, and preached after the Reading. These two last might be performed by any Layman of sufficient Abilities. Our Lord taught in the Synagogues both these ways. When he was at his own City *Nazareth*, he was called out, as a Member of that Synagogue, to read the Section or Lesson of the Day, *Luke* iv. When he read, he stood up, and when he expounded he sate down, according to the usage of the *Jews* in both these cases, who stood up in reverence to the Sacred Text, and sate in regard to themselves as Teachers. In all other Synagogues, Christ when he was present, taught the People in Sermons, after the Scriptures had been read and expounded by somebody else: The like did St. *Paul* in the Synagogue of *Antioch* in *Pisidia*, St. *Luke* his attendant expressly noting, that his preaching was after the reading of the Law and the Prophets.

THIS is a brief account of the conveniences with respect to Place, which the *Israelites* had to hear the Word of God. Their Synagogues, according to what I have noted, might well be supposed to be more frequent than Churches are in our Christian Countries.

AS for the times and seasons which they set apart for these religious Exercises, we may be sure the Sabbath or seventh Day was one, and that from the very Style of the Law, which commands it to be kept Holy. But it would be a strange way of sanctifying this day, to spend it in meer inactivity, or wanton Sports and Pastimes; though some Societies of Jews in Christian Countries have been so sensual as to think this Rest was granted them for no better purposes. But their Ancestors assure us, that *Moses of old time had in every City them that preached him, being read in the Synagogues every Sabbath Day*, as we read *Acts xv. 21*. Besides this, they had several Fasts and Festivals, as we have, whereon they assembled for religious Worship. And besides these solemn times, *Maimonides in Tephillah assures us, that they performed their ordinary Synagogue-service on Mondays and Thursdays every Week.*

AS thus they had opportunity three days in seven for hearing the Word of God in their Synagogues, so thrice on every of those days they said their Prayers in those Places. For it was a constant rule among them, that all were bound to pray to God three times a day, *viz.* at the times of Morning and Evening Sacrifice, and at the beginning of Night.

THESE times of Prayer were of very ancient usage among the People of God; for *Holy David Psalm iv, saith, in the Evening and Morning, and at Noon-day will I pray, and that instantly, and he shall hear my Voice:* and *Daniel in Babylon opened his Windows towards Jerusalem, and kneeled down and prayed, and gave thanks to God three times a day, as he did aforetime.* Whence it is plain, that these Hours of Prayer were not introduced after the *Babylonian Captivity*, but were of longer standing.

THUS

THUS we have taken a view of the settled Provisions and Opportunities which the *Israelites* had for the publick Worship of God; which if they had attended with constancy and reverence, they had preserved themselves in his true Faith and Worship, and consequently escaped those Judgments of Pestilence, War, and Captivity, which their Impieties and Idolatries drew upon them. This brings me in the

2d Place to speak of their Abuses of the Means of divine Communion which God afforded them.

WE read several times in the History of this People, that the Divine Law was so slighted among them, *that every Man did that which was right in his own Eyes.* Which is telling us in effect, that they were a Law to themselves, took what Liberties they pleased to absent themselves from the Assemblies of Divine Worship, and so by degrees made those places desolate and unfrequented. How could it be otherwise in those ages which were grown so profane, that even *Solomon's* Temple was filled with Rubbish, and the Book of the Law so neglected, *that it was buried and lost under the heaps of it.*

WHEN the ordinances of God, which were settled with the greatest Solemnity and full demonstrations of his power and pleasure, were thus trampled upon, as we read they were, it had been just with him to cast such a rebellious People out of his sight, without striving by any farther means to reclaim them from the evil of their ways. However, to magnifie his own infinite Goodness, and to save a remnant which had been carried away with the Errors of the Wicked, through the iniquities of the times they lived in, he raised up Prophets from time to time, to carry them immediate Messages from his own Mouth, and warn them of the

Calamities

Calamities which were coming upon them. The *Babylonian* Captivity was foretold by many Prophets, particularly, by those two noble and eminent ones, *Isaiah* and *Jeremiah*, several years before it was accomplished; the Sins which occasioned it were fully discovered, and the People called to Repentance, in order to prevent it. Yet these excellent Men, who sufficiently proved that they spoke by the Spirit of God, were exploded by the great ones of their times as Impostors and Liars, and were hunted into Prisons and to Death; while those that prophesied contrary things were rewarded with the favours and smiles of their Governors. *Isaiah* bitterly complains of the contemptuous scornful Spirit which exalted it self against him; xlvi. 4. *Thy neck, says he, is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass;* and lxv. 2. *All day long have I stretched forth my hand to a disobedient and gain-saying people.* *Jeremiah* was made the subject of publick Derision and Mockery: *all his acquaintance watched for his halting,* xx. 10. they sought to lay hold of something in his Words or Actions, whereon they might accuse him and ruin him. When his Prophecy, written on a Roll of Parchment, was laid before *Jeheziakim*, Son of *Josiah* King of *Judah*, Chap. xxxvi. he cut it to pieces and threw it into the Fire, and sought after the Prophet to imprison him or destroy him. And when they saw his Predictions verified in the destruction of *Jerusalem*, and pretended then to value him, and *Johanan*, with the Captains and remains of their Forces besought him to enquire of God for them, what course they should take in this extremity, chap. xlvi. and solemnly swore to obey the Answer, whether it should seem good or evil to them; yet when he told them it was *the will of God that they should abide in their own land,*

land, and not go to sojourn in *Egypt*, as then they intended; because this answer crost their Intentions, they confidently told him *he spoke falsely, and that the Lord had not sent him, but that he sought to deliver them into the hand of the Chaldeans*; and thus, notwithstanding their Oath of Obedience, they went down into *Egypt*, and carried the Prophet along with them.

THIS makes it the less surprising to us, to hear the Character which God gives of them in my Text, that when the Captivity was begun, and many of them were carried away to *Babylon*, even then they continued to be most rebellious; as this Prophet has informed us that he found them, in the Accounts which he has recorded of their Hardness and Impenitence to the last. Finally, all the Prophets agree in declaiming against their Pride and Atheism, and Forgetfulness of God, upbraiding them with their Ingratitude and Insensibility, that they were not capable of being converted and saved by any Methods, either of Judgment or Mercy; they treat them as People that had neither Eyes to see, nor Ears to hear; they cry out to *Heaven and Earth to hear the Word of the Lord*; *Isai. i. 2.* intimating thereby, that the inanimate Part of the Creation was as likely to regard them as these Men. Such was the incurable Obstinacy of the main Body of this People, in all Circumstances, happy and miserable, in *Canaan*, or in *Chaldea*, under the settled Ordinances of Religion, or the extraordinary Ministrations of their Prophets.

THIS is a proper Warning to all those of the present Generation, who continue in their Sins, while the Means of divine Grace abound towards them. They may harden their Hearts until they

are

are past feeling, and go on in their evil Ways so far, 'till all the Powers of Heaven and Earth cannot turn them. For this is the dreadful Consequence of resisting and despising the Means of Grace, that the unhappy Sinner is daily more perplexed and entangled in the Cords of his Sins, the Spirit of God ceases to strive with him, his Conscience no longer reproves him, no degree of Spiritual Life remains in him, he is dead in Sins and Trespasses.

IT is an Observation of one of our ancient Fathers, proper to be mentioned on this occasion, and it is grounded upon a Saying of the wise *Solomon*, *That God has provided no Remedy for Obstinate*. The proud Scorer and Vilifier of holy Things, must fall into inevitable Destruction. Other Sins are not so riveted and complicated in the Heart of Man, but that they may be drawn out of it. A lustful *Magdalen*, a worldly *Zaccheus*, a rich *Nicodemus*, have easily been persuaded to forsake their Errors and follow Christ: But a proud conceited *Pharisee*, who turns the Gospel into Burlesque and Ridicule, withstands the last and strongest Means of Grace, and laughs himself into final Impenitence.

2. HENCE we learn the Patience and Long-suffering of God towards the worst of Men; how long he waits to be gracious, *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance*. He knew that this People was most rebellious, and that the far greatest Part of them would hear nothing of his Will; yet he sends his Prophet after them, even in their Captivity, to teach them how to sanctify this Affliction, and help them to recover their Souls from the Tyranny of the Devil, to whom they had been long enslaved. Temporal Sufferings are a proper Means

to humble ungodly Men, to mollify their hard Hearts, to awaken them out of that Security which was the Effect of former Prosperity, and to shew them that Salvation is of the Lord. But however, when God sees that his Corrections will not dispose Men to return to him, yet he continues to invite them for the Manifestation of his Goodness, that the World may see and be witness how loth he is to punish, and how much he delights to exercise Loving-kindness towards the Children of Men. There is a Passage frequently repeated in the Prophet *Jeremiah*, which well declares the Goodness of God in this Dispensation. It is most full *Jer. vii. 25.* *Since the day that your Fathers came forth out of the Land of Egypt, unto this day, I have even sent unto you all my Servants the Prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their Ear, but hardened their Neck, they did worse than their Fathers. Therefore thou shalt speak all these Words unto them, but they will not hearken to thee: thou shalt also call unto them, but they will not answer thee. But thou shalt say unto them, This is a Nation that obeyeth not the Voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth Correction: Truth is perished, and is cut off from their Mouth.* But

LASTLY, and to conclude; Since God waits with so much Patience to be gracious to an unworthy People, the Ministers and Dispensers of his Grace are bound to imitate him herein, and speak all his Words to such People, *whether they will bear, or whether they will forbear.* For he is Lord of all, and must be served in his own way, and not at the Discretion of those who are but Instruments in his Hands. He knows who are his Children, and at what Time, and by what Motives their Hearts shall be touched, *and turned from Darkness*

*Darkness*

*Darkness to Light, and from the Power of Sin and Satan unto God.* His Children are but a very small and select number, out of Multitudes which are as the Sand upon the Sea-shore. And though they should bear no more proportion to the Rebels, than they did in *Israel*, in the Days of *Elijah*, yet for their Sakes God thinks it worth while to continue the publick Ministry of his Word and Sacraments. Though all the rest should be as stiff-hearted, as much Briers and Thorns, and Scorpions to the Christian Minister, as *Israel* was to the Prophet *Ezekiel*, yet it is worth while to sow the Seed of the Word, though it light but upon one good Heart in such a Multitude of Scorners. Christ himself and his Apostles had but a handful of their numerous Hearers, who proved Doers of God's Word. And though we have no manner of Grounds to promise our selves greater Conversations, yet we are very sure that our Heavenly Father is always pleased with us, when we pray to him to have Mercy upon all Men, and to take from them all Rebellion, Hardnes of Heart, and Contempt of his Word and Commandment, and so to fetch them home to his own Flock, that they may be saved among the Remnant of true *Israelites*, and become one Fold under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with the Father, &c.





## SERMON LXXXII.

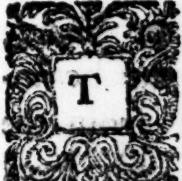
*On the Sixteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*

E V E N I N G.

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E Z E K I E L xiii. 4.

*O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts.*

  
WO evils there were which were common to the Jews, and brought them in the end to utter desolation, viz. their listening to false Prophets, and their deafness to the true: For which they were remarkable at sundry times, but more especially when they were upon the brink of any grievous calamity: Of which when God forewarned them by his messengers the true Prophets, telling them that he was about to scourge them for their impieties, and calling them to repentance in order to their preservation, then there always started up a number of false Prophets, who contradicted such denunciations of divine Judgments, assuring the people that God was at peace with them, and that they might rest secure of his Favour and Protection. And these Impostors had two advantages over the Prophets

Prophets of God, whereby they quite outshone them in the eyes of their hearers.

*First, IN* that their numbers were incomparably greater. Thus in the general convention at Mount *Carmel* for the trial of true Religion, King *Ahab* produced four hundred and fifty Prophets of *Baal* against one single servant of the true God, the Prophet *Elijah*. And again, in his council of war about his expedition against *Ramoth-Gilead*, he had four hundred Prophets for him to one against him. Four hundred of them promised him victory in the name of the Lord, and only one dissentient voice, that of *Micaiah*, foreboded the issue which God had decreed, and which happened accordingly.

AND I doubt not but his successors continuing a bad state of Religion (for *Jehu* and his whole line departed not from *Jeroboam's* sins) the number of false Prophets prevailed against the true, till *Israel* was carried away captive by the *Affyrians*. As for *Judah*, how it swarmed with these deceivers, at the beginning of the *Babylonian* captivity, appears from the frequent complaints of *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*, who lived at those times, and were continually opposed and run down by them.

*Secondly, THE* false Prophets were more acceptable to the generations wherein they lived, than the true, because they never saw any thing but peace and prosperity, they liberally dispensed their blessings and encomiums upon their Governors and present state of affairs, they were entirely obsequious to all that were in authority, and out-run them in their zeal for every thing which they saw them inclinable to establish or practise; they were very courteous and good-humoured to all sorts of men, except only to such of their own

own profession as spoke nothing but plain truth in the name of the Lord; which being very inconsistent with the fashions and humours of the times they lived in, they commonly obliged a great majority of people, by making a jest of these troublesome Prophets and their sayings; and sometimes they procured them to be arrested and thrown into prison, as enemies of their Country, which at the same time raised their own character, as the truest friends and defenders of it.

OF such various treatment *Jeremiah* complains in the Book of his Prophecy. *First*, he says, chap. xi. that the men of *Anathoth*, the place of his habitation and inheritance, threatned him, that if he went on to prophesie in the name of the Lord, as he had begun, they would certainly put him to death. Now *Anathoth* being a City appropriated to the Priests, as we read *Joshua* xxi. 18. we must say, that these were false Prophets, *i. e.* irreligious and time-serving Priests, who thus conspired against him. *Secondly*, He tells, chap. xx. how *Pashur*, a chief Priest of the Temple, upon hearing him prophesie, struck him, and set him in the stocks which were in the high gate of *Benjamin* near the Temple; and that upon this occasion he was made the subject of derision and mockery; and idle fellows turned his prophecy into a kind of ballad, and sung it about the streets to make it contemptible. *Thirdly*, In the beginning of the reign of *Jehoiakim*, he says, chap. xxvi. that God commanded him to go and stand in the court of the Temple, and declare before all the Cities of *Judah* which came up to worship, that if they would not hearken now to the divine Warnings, and walk in the Law of God, he would make the Temple as desolate as *Shiloh*, and *Jerusalem* a curse to all Nations of the Earth. The Prophet performed his

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charge; but as soon as he had done, the Priests and Prophets, and People at their instigation, laid hold of him, and were leading him out to put him to death, which they would soon have done, had not some of the Nobility, who were apprized of it, hastened thither, and rescued him out of their hands. *Fourthly,* In the fourth year and fifth month of Zedekiah's reign, *Hananiah* the Prophet confronted *Jeremiah* in the Temple, in the presence of the Priests and all the People there assembled, and declared with the greatest gravity and assurance, saying, *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring again into this place, all the vessels of the Lord's house, which Nebuchadnezzar has taken away and carried to Babylon. And I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Je-hoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah that went into Babylon, saith the Lord; for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.* Now tho' this was directly contrary to what *Jeremiah* had asserted, yet so great a concern had he for the welfare of his Nation, and so heartily did he wish that God would repent him of the evil which he had threatened, that he said *Amen* with a loud voice to *Hananiah*'s prophecy, and added, *The Lord do so, the Lord perform the words which thou hast prophesied:* And he parted with *Hananiah* in such a manner as if he hoped to find his words verified; but he had not gone far, before the Spirit of God revealed it to him, that this *Hananiah* was an Impostor, and remanded him back to tell him, *The Lord hath not sent thee, but thou makest this people to trust in a lie; wherefore the Lord will cut thee off from the face of the earth, and thou shalt die this year, because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord.* Accordingly *Hananiah*

died

died, and nothing of what he had prophesied came to pass. Which I note the more particularly, to expose the monstrous impiety of these false Prophets, who would so seriously and solemnly affirm things in the name of God, which they knew to be false, that they would even stagger the faith of the true Prophets, and make them doubt of the certainty of their own revelations. *Jerem. xxviii.*

MUCH to the same purpose, and about the same time, is that passage in the next Chapter concerning *Shemaiah*, a false Prophet among the Jewish Exiles in *Chaldea*; to which Exiles when *Jeremiah* had written, exhorting them to live quietly there, and not hearken to the Prophets among them, who deluded them with vain hopes of a speedy return home; for that God had decreed them a seventy years captivity; this *Shemaiah* writ back to all the People at *Jerusalem*, and particularly to *Zephaniah* the Priest, saying, 'Hath the Lord made you an officer in his house, to keep a watchful eye over madmen, that they set not up for Prophets, and to restrain such pretenders with the correction of the stocks? Why then do not you restrain *Jeremiah* of *Anathoth*, who hath sent to us in *Babylon*, saying, This captivity is long; build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them.' Thus we see how industrious the false Prophets were to get *Jeremiah* imprisoned and punished, which after a while they prevailed for. First, *Zedekiah*, in the last year but one of his reign, when the *Chaldean* army besieged *Jerusalem*, shut up this Prophet in the court of the prison of his palace, and gave this reason for it, because he prophesied that both King and City should fall a prey to the *Chaldeans*, chap. xxxii. Secondly, A little after, when

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the enemy raised the siege to fight the *Egyptian* army, which was coming upon them in favour of the *Jews*, and *Jeremiah*, who had *got* his liberty, told the citizens that the *Chaldeans* would return and burn the City, and was making his own escape out of it, they seized him as a deserter, and imprisoned him again, chap. xxxvii. *Thirdly*, Upon his persisting in these predictions, the *Jewish* Princes threw him into the dungeon of his former prison, chap. xxxviii. where his mouth had been effectually stopt, for he must have been stifled in the mire of it, if he had not been speedily drawn out at the instance of an *Ethiopian*, servant to *Zedekiah*, who interceded with the King for his deliverance, and prevailed.

NOW in all this we see the picture of *Jewish* atheism, sensuality, and incurable enmity to the truths of God. For we find them continually persecuting *Jeremiah*, while they had continual proofs of the truth of his prophecies, and finally saw them entirely accomplished in the ruin of their Kingdom, and their own captivity. Yet even then they refused to hearken to him. For when upon the dissolution of their Government, *Jobanan* and other Captains of their forces, and all the men under their command, consulted God by the Ministry of *Jeremiah*, which way they should dispose of themselves, tho' they applied to him with great solemnity, and bound themselves with an oath to follow his direction, whether it should seem good or evil to them, yet when he forbad them in God's name, and upon pain of his highest displeasure, to go down into *Egypt*, whither they were disposed to go, they were not ashamed to call him false Prophet, and went thither in defiance of their oath, and carried him by force along with them. Whereas if he had really

really been a false Prophet, he had suffered nothing of all this from them: But they would have treated him as the Servant of God, their dear Friend, a lover of his Country and People, if he had always been of their opinion, and chosen their ways, and bestowed the blessings and best *omens* of a Prophet upon all their endeavours.

THUS I have opened the state of the *Jewish* Church and Kingdom at the time when *Ezekiel* prophesied; for he was cotemporary with *Jeremiah*, he was under the influence of the same Spirit, and prophesied of much the same things with him. Particularly as to the mischievous prevalence of false Prophets, he shews it was much the same in *Chaldea*, where he now resided, that *Jeremiah* complains of in *Jerusalem*. And by an apt similitude, he intimates how detrimental they were to God's vineyard and heritage, the land of *Judah*. *O Israel*, says he, *thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts.*

IF we conceive of the land of *Judah* as a vineyard (to which it is compared in the *Psalms* and the Prophets) we shall see that the false Prophets are fitly represented under the notion of Foxes. For,

First, THESE creatures are lovers of grapes, as we know by a common proverb; and consequently they did much damage in such Countries as *Judaea*, which abounded with vineyards, as is noted *Cant. ii. 15.* not only by devouring the grapes, but also by making holes in the walls and fences, whereby they laid open the vineyards to other ravenous beasts as well as to themselves. Just so did the false Prophets to the Cities of *Judah*: They did not only beguile people of their substance, by the character which they assumed, and the figure which they made among them; but by

their false doctrines and subversions of the genuine will and word of God, they broke down the walls and fences from about them ; I mean that blessing and protection of the Almighty, which was annexed to the obedience of his own Laws. Nay they broke thro' the walls literally, and without a metaphor: For to their provocations of God, and misguidance of his people it was owing, that the *Chaldeans* came at three or four several times, in the reigns of *Jeboiakim*, *Jeconiah*, and *Zedekiah*, under whom these Prophets prevailed, and so battered the walls of *Jerusalem* and other places, that at last they laid them level with the ground.

Secondly, IN another respect did these Prophets resemble the Foxes in the deserts, that they could make breaches, but had not the faculty of stopping them up again. *Ye have not gone up into the gaps*, says *Ezekiel*, *nor made up the hedge for the house of Israel*. They did not call the people to repentance: Or if they did, it was but such a superficial fast as we read of, *Jerem. xxxvi.* at which they read his prophecy, and then cut it in pieces, and threw it into the fire. Their making up of their breaches this way, was but like the labour of unfaithful builders; one laid the stones in the wall, and others daubed it with untempered mortar.

SOME leading man among them proposed ways and means how they might resist the power of the *Babylonians*, by augmenting their own forces, by making alliances with the *Egyptians* and other Nations, or by any expedient which had a politick appearance; and then all the Prophets, his admirers and followers, built upon it and blessed it in all their discourses. But they took special care not to meddle with such publick

lick lusts as their idolatries had consecrated: For to this end they embraced idolatry, that they might have a religious sanction and colouring for their sins. Here indeed, in demolishing these lusts, they should have begun to dig for a foundation, for repairing the breaches between God and themselves. They should have pulled down pride and oppression, rioting and uncleanness, blasphemy and scurrility which God complained of, and have built in their room justice and judgment, sobriety and modesty, humility and the fear of God, which he delights in; and then they had laid a good foundation, and built with well-tempered mortar. But now, as their work stands, God threatens to send upon it a stormy wind in his fury, and a tempest of hail and rain in his anger, which should throw down their wall, and discover the rottenness of its foundation, and consume those that are in the midst of it. This tempest was the army of the Chaldeans, which accomplished this threatening.

Thirdly, THESE false Prophets resembled Foxes in their fraudulent practices. By crafty speeches and cunningly devised fables they mis-led the hearts of the simple. They studied how to suit their discourses to the various tempers of the people whom they conversed with; to prophesie smooth things to the stout-hearted, and terrible things to the timorous, that they might keep them all in the way which they would have them to walk in. This is what God charges upon them in this xiii. chap. of *Ezekiel*. *Ye slay the souls that should not die, and save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that bear your lies. Ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his evil way, by promising him life.*

THIS gives us an idea of the arbitrary interpretations which these men put upon holy Writ. For as they spoke to the people in the name of the Lord, so I doubt not but they pretended to discourse consistently with his written word. And that they might make a fair show of this, they would quote with much seeming devotion such Texts as they could turn to favour their purposes, but never touched upon others, which could not be so perverted. Thus, for instance, they might undertake to confute the prophecies of *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* concerning their captivity, and the dissolution of their Kingdom, by asserting that God had promised to establish the House and Kingdom of *David* for ever, *2 Sam. vii. 16.* which could not be verified, if the Kingdom of *Judah*, where alone his Family reigned, should be dissolved. But they would hardly confront this promise with that threatening, *Deut. xxviii. 36.* which was antecedent to it, and which forewarns *Israel* in case of Apostasy, thus: *The Lord shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, and there shalt thou serve other Gods, wood and stone.* This proves their conclusion from the promise to be false; for it might be made good to the house of *David*, notwithstanding that some of them, by their sins against God, might fall into the captivity threatened in *Deuteronomy*, and so cause a long interruption in their kingly Office, as in fact it has happened, and as these Prophets might have reasonably interpreted, if they had considered the promise and the threatening together, and compared the manners of their Princes and People with the divine Law. But they were *Foxes*, i. e. time-serving interpreters of God's word;

word; and like their late posterity, the Scribes and Pharisees, and much later Disciples and Pupils in Christian Divinity, they would quote or conceal Texts, just as they pleased, and never wanted such glosses and traditions, as would make Scripture speak that meaning, which their lusts or interests demanded of them.

THUS the Prophets; and no less craftily did the Prophetesses act. For of the other sex also were at several times both true and false teachers in *Israel*. These before us counter-acted the true Prophets by emblems peculiar to their sex. And whereas the true Prophets used a coarse dress to denote the hardships which were approaching with the captivity, these Prophetesses made kerchiefs or neat head-tires for all sizes and statures of their own sex, to intimate that they were not afraid of any hardships: Whereas the true Prophets put yokes upon their necks, as a proper emblem of the bondage of their captivity, these women sewed soft pillows under the arms of their female domesticks and scholars, signifying thereby that they expected times of rest and peace.

Fourthly, THESE false Prophets had another property of Foxes, which was a prouling ravenous appetite. When they came out of their colleges into the vineyard (for in such places they were educated as well as better men) they resolved that the making of their fortune, the arriving at a plentiful condition, a goodly heritage, should be the first and greatest of all their cares. So little were they concerned for the welfare of the people, over whom they pretended to be guardians and spiritual watchmen, that they would sell their souls, as God complains here, *for handfuls of barley, and morsels of bread.* The sacrifices

fices which they offered most frequently, and studied to render most acceptable, were to Princes and great Men, whom they worshipped and served much more diligently than they did the divine Majesty: Towards them they were careful to order their words and conversation in the most obsequious and respectful manner, to be of their opinions, to have the same friends and enemies, the same notions of Religion, and of virtue and vice, and in every thing to be like them. Not that they really loved one man more than another, or a prince above a peasant, for their love all centred in themselves; but it was the station, the power which they courted; which was able to illustrate them with the beams of worldly honours, and make them shine in the eyes of the people, and attract their esteem and admiration. For vulgar eyes are dazzled with pompous appearance, and generally conclude that real worth resides where-ever they see the rewards and ornaments of it. And therefore these false Prophets, whose sensual appetites were rank and predominant, laboured for nothing so much as to move in a high sphere; no matter how they ascended; they knew that most who looked up at them, would read their own merits in their exaltation.

*Lastly*, AS Foxes are of the number of unclean beasts, so these Prophets were men of corrupt minds and loose morals. How prone they were to prevaricate with God, and seduce the People, to counterfeit a divine Mission, to run when they were not sent, to prophesie out of their own heart without a revelation, to proclaim their visions of peace, when there was no peace; is abundantly set forth in this xiii of *Ezekiel*. And it is very natural to conclude that they were libertines in eating, drinking, and other sensual enjoyments,

ments, when we consider that they had no spiritual affections, nor any regard for Religion as such, but only as it was a way to advance them in the world, to bring them into the acquaintance and friendship of great men, to make them considerable in the Government, to gain them esteem and interest with the people, to recommend them to advantageous marriages, and the like. Nay *Jeremiah* charges them with grosser sensuality, chap. xxiii. 9. where he speaks of their lewdness with horror, in these words; ‘ My heart is broken within me, all my bones shake because of the Prophets. For the land is full of adultery by their encouragement: Because of swearing the land mourneth, thro’ the prophaneness of Prophets and Priests. The Prophets of *Jerusalem* commit adultery, they walk in lies, they strengthen the hands of evil doers, that none doth return from his wickedness: They are all of them unto me as *Sodom*, and the inhabitants thereof as *Gomorrah*:— For from the Prophets of *Jerusalem* is prophaneness gone forth into all the land.’

THIS may serve for a short answer to that question which some will be apt to move, how the people could know the false Prophets from the true. They might easily know them, not only by the failure of their predictions, but by the enormities of their lives, which were so wide of the Law of God, and the conversation of his real faithful servants, that it was impossible, might any one say, for any degree of the holy Spirit of God to inspire such men.

UNHAPPY *Israel* and men of *Judah*! whose Canaan was guarded by such treacherous watchmen as helped to devour it, and broke down the fences of it, and exposed it to the judgments of God, and the arms of

of foreign invaders. But yet these people have left us no room to pity them; for their unhappiness was of themselves; it was owing to their own choice and conduct. Witness all their true Prophets, but especially these two here before us. *We are under these horrid circumstances*, says *Jeremiah*, v. 30. *that our prophets prophesie falsely, and our people love to have it so.* He tells us they would not endure those who reproved their favourite corruptions, and alarmed them with the judgments of War and captivity as ready to fall upon them, except they repented. No, they would hear none but such as entertained them with smooth and pleasant discourses, and assured them that God was at peace with them, and well satisfied with their state of Religion and Virtue. And when any Prophet had the courage to deal faithfully and truly with them, to measure their evil ways by the line of God's Law, to shew them their perverseness, and the destruction which hung over them, they never failed to disown him, and to bring him into trouble, and danger of his life, as *Jeremiah* proves abundantly from what happened to himself.

MAY we hope for a more corrigible and candid generation of men among our selves! Men who are willing to know the diseases of their souls, and to be cured of them! Men, who tho' they will not presently follow the admonitions of the Prophet, yet are so far friends to sincerity and truth, as to hear him patiently, and to respect him, defend him, maintain him for doing his duty! Men who hate to be flattered, *i. e.* abused, in cases of the last moment to their souls and bodies! If we cannot hope for numerous assemblies of such men, yet we will pray, even against hope, that those of a contrary disposition may

not

not be so unhappy as to have false Prophets for their guides, who will harden them in their errors, and hasten their destruction. We will pray that God would so bless our Christian Canaan, the spiritual vine-yard which he hath planted amongst us, *that it may not be a portion for such Foxes as were the ruin of Israel.* We will pray that all the Ministers and Dispensers of God's word may boldly rebuke vice, and faithfully declare his whole will to the people, after the example of their great Master, who has made himself a pattern of this courage and impartiality, *Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom &c.*





# SERMON LXXXIII.

*On the Seventeenth Sunday after TRINITY.*

M O R N I N G.

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E Z E K. xiv. 7.

*For every one of the House of Israel, or of the Stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his Idols in his Heart, and putteth the Stumbling-block of his Iniquity before his Face, and cometh to a Prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the Lord will answer him by my self.*



HIS is Part of the Answer which the Prophet *Ezekiel* returned from God to certain of the chief Men of *Israel*, when they came to him to desire him to ask Counsel of the Lord, what they should do to extricate themselves from the Hardships of War and Captivity, which were brought upon them by the *Babylonians*. God's Answer was agreeable to the Merits of the Enquirers. 'These Men, says he, ver. 3.  
‘ have

‘ have set up their Idols in their Hearts, and put the  
 ‘ Stumbling-block of their Iniquity before their face; and  
 ‘ do they consult me while they are so affected?  
 ‘ Let them repent and turn from their Idols, and  
 ‘ turn away their Faces from all their Abominations,  
 ‘ and make themselves my People, and then I will  
 ‘ be their God.

THIS was the Condition upon which God would lend an Ear to their Prayers, and stretch out his Hand for their Deliverance. So long as they ad-dicted themselves to the Worship of other Gods, it was very meet and right, that they should look to them for Help in the Day of Adversity, and experience their Folly in depending upon such Helpers as had no Power to save. This was the fair and equal Reference which God made upon other Occasions. Thus we read *Judges* x. that when *Israel* being invaded by a great Army of *Ammonites*, cried unto the Lord to shew them a Way for their Deliverance, his Answer was, *Go cry unto the Gods whom ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your Tribulation.* So likewise *2 Kings* iii. when *Jeheram*, Son of *Ahab*, King of *Israel*, addressed himself to *Elisha* to obtain succour for him against the *Moabites*, *What have I to do with thee*, said *Elisha*: *Get thee to the Prophets of thy Father and of thy Mother.* And such Returns we find in other Sayings of holy Prophets, to upbraid an impious People with the Vanity of their Idols.

AND yet notwithstanding this palpable Vanity and Imbecillity of Idols, so prone has the World ever been to invent and run after strange Gods, that it is hard to find any Age or Nation wherein this Madness has not prevailed. As to the antediluvian

World,

World, all our History of it being no more than what is contained in the first six Chapters of *Genesis*, we can make but very slender Conjectures of the State of its Religion in this respect. *Tertullian* indeed thought that Idolatry began in the Days of *Seth*, and that *Enoch* restored true Religion, and is for that Reason said in Scripture, *to have walked with God*. But he has concealed his Ground of this Opinion; and we can find nothing so likely to move him to it, as the Esteem he had for the apocryphal Prophecy of *Enoch*, in which are contained severe Threatnings both against the Makers and Worshippers of Idols.

BUT certain it is, that quickly after the World was restored from the Destruction made by the Flood, Idolatry sprung up among the renewed and multiplied Race of Men, in that exorbitant Honour which they paid to the Souls of their famous Ancestors, and to the Host of Heaven, the Sun, Moon, and Stars, which were notoriously idolized in the Days of *Job*, as we learn by his Protestation of his own Innocence in this respect. Chap. xxxi. *If I beheld the Sun, says he, when it shined, or the Moon walking in Brightness: and my Heart hath been secretly inticed, or my Mouth hath kissed my Hand [in token of Adoration] this were Iniquity to be punished by the Judge; for I should have denied the God that is above.* And *Diodorus Siculus*, who was born and bred up in Idolatry, has this Remark in his historical Library, lib. 1. ‘ That the most ancient Inhabitants of the Earth, (meaning those that lived soon after the Flood, and particularly the Egyptians,) contemplating the World above them, and being astonished with high Admiration of the Nature

' Nature of the Universe, believed that there were ' eternal Gods, and that the two principal of them ' were the Sun and the Moon: Of which they ' called the first *Osiris*, and the second *Iisis*.' These were the visible Parts of the Creation, which were most anciently and universally idolized, as we may collect from our discoveries of the *American Countries*, where different People have been found to have their peculiar Idols; but the Sun was every where esteemed a Deity.

TO come now to the Religion of the People of *Israel*: *Abraham*, the Founder of their Nation, is the first man that we read of in his time, who made open profession of the true God. So generally was the World then over-run with Idolatry; his own Father's house not being free from it. For which reason God commanded him to leave his Family and his Country, and to reside in such places where he might exercise his Religion, with less temptation to depart from it. Not but that he found opposition from Idolaters, besides other hardships in his Pilgrimage; which rendered his Faith so superlatively glorious, and gave occasion to the Prophets and Apostles so highly to celebrate him, as one that had the courage to profess the true God in a World of Idolaters, and took care, according to the Testimony which God hath given of him, *to teach his Children and his Household after him, that they should keep the way of the Lord*.

*ABRAHAM* was certainly very careful in this matter; and his near descendants, I mean his Son and Grand-son, *Isaac* and *Jacob*, trode in his steps; but his remoter Posterity sadly degenerated from their

Fathers Faith. Let us look a little into the causes and degrees of their degeneracy.

THE first time that we read of Idols in *Jacob*, is Gen. 31. where *Rachel* is said to have stolen the Images of *Laban* her Father, which he calls his Gods. Their name in the original is *Teraphim*, which differing but one letter from *Seraphim*, has induced some to think that they were Images dedicated to some Angels: And that *Rachel* stole them, either for the value of the metal, or that her Father might not divine by them, which way her Family had made their escape from him. Whatever they were, or for what end soever taken away, we are sure they were taken without the privity of *Jacob*, who when he discovered them, demanded them of his Wives, and buried them under an Oak near *Shechem*, as we learn Gen. xxxv. and so they had no farther bad influence in his Family.

THE next perilous time of Idolatry to the *Israelites*, was, when they went down in a Famine of Bread to sojourn in that great School of Idol-worship, the Land of *Egypt*, and continued there till God delivered them by the hand of *Moses* and *Aaron*. Though the divine Providence had so ordered it, that they should dwell by themselves in the land of *Goshen*, yet afterwards it is certain that they mingled with these Heathen, and learned their ways. The Jewish Doctors tell us, that all the Tribes were here tainted with Idolatry, except the Tribe of *Levi*, of which *Moses* and *Aaron* were descended, who were therefore more fit to reform this People, and reduce them to the Religion of their Fathers.

NO Care was wanting in them, nor in God by them to effect this. The whole body of their Laws, Moral,

Moral, Ritual, and Judicial, was composed with this view. Every page of them is seasoned with some antidote against Idolatry. The two first Commandments of the Decalogue oblige men to worship one God in a spiritual way, without Images. Death without Mercy is denounced against those who shall but attempt to seduce them to the contrary.

AND yet it is evident, from various passages of Sacred Writ, that during their forty years wandering in the Wilderness, they never were thoroughly weaned from the Idols of *Egypt*. After they had been terrified with Thunderings and Lightnings, and the voice of God, at the delivery of the Law from Mount *Sinai*, yet because *Moses* spent more time in receiving it than they expected, they fell into the shameful idolatry of the Golden Calf. When afterwards they came into the borders of *Moab*, and by their abode there contracted some acquaintance with the *Moabites*, they accepted of their invitations to the Sacrifices of their Gods, *and joined themselves unto Baal-peor, and eat the offerings of the dead*. And at last, when *Joshua* had settled them in their long-desired *Canaan*, and was taking his leave of them, as being near his End, he found it necessary, in his farewell Oration, to insist chiefly upon their putting away strange Gods from among them, and adhering to the Religion of their Fathers. And though they very solemnly plighted their Faith to him, to do all that he required of them, yet the History of the succeeding Judges contains little else but Narratives of their frequent lapses into Idolatry, and grievous sufferings for the same.

MUCH to the same purpose with *Joshua's* last Exhortation, are those words of *Samuel*, the last of their Judges, *1 Sam. vii.* *If you do return to the*

*Lord with all your Hearts, then put away the strange Gods, and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your Hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines. Then the Children of Israel put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only.*

A very little while it was, after they had been erected into a Kingdom, that their Kings themselves became the Authors and Patrons of Idolatry among them. *Solomon, the third in Succession, who excelled in wisdom, wealth and grandeur, and was blest with so much Peace and Plenty, that he had both time and means to build God a magnificent House, yet he unhappily sullied the Glory of his great Abilities and rare Atchievements, by suffering himself to be seduced to Idolatry by the persuasion of his Heathen Wives and Concubines. For he went after Ashtoreth the Goddess of the Sidonians, he built an High Place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, in the Hill that is before Jerusalem; and for Molech the abomination of the children of Ammon. And the like he did for all his strange Wives, burning Incense, and sacrificing to their Gods. 1 Kings xi.*

THIS provoked God to take from his Family the ten Tribes of *Israel*, and give them to his Servant *Jeroboam* to reign over them, with a promise to continue this Kingdom in his Family, in case he would keep the Laws and Ordinances of God. Yet neither had he the Faith to depend upon his high Benefactor, for the continuance of this blessing which he had so manifestly conferred upon him; but corrupted Religion so grossly, as to merit the character of the King who made *Israel* to sin.

FROM henceforth very few Kings of *Israel* or *Judah* were free from Idolatry: which brought both Nations into Captivity; *Israel* by *Salmaneser* King of *Affyria*, and *Judah* by *Nebuchadnezzar* King of *Babylon*.

AND here should end our account of *Jewish* Idolatries, if their Captivities had so effectually cured them of this sin, as some have imagined. But the ancient Author of the first Book of *Maccabees*, who writ their History in that interval of time between the last of the Prophets and the coming of Christ, informs us, that long after their return from *Babylon*, when *Antiochus Epiphanes* King of *Syria* prevailed over them, and set up the Statue of *Jupiter Olympius* on the Altar of their second Temple, which was enough to have moved pious men to have fled from the City, many of the *Israelites*, either out of fear or inclination, consented to be of the King's Religion, and *sacrificed to his Idols, and profaned the Sabbath*; as we read *I Maccab. i. 43.*

NOW what could be more provoking to God, than these mens frequent relapses into this Sin of Idolatry, after he had given them such strong Arguments and Reasons against it! shewing them by manifold Calamities, Slaughters, Outrages of all kinds, which he suffered their Enemies to commit upon them, when they forsook him, that it was not in the power of their Idols to relieve them: putting them so often in mind, as he does by his Prophets, that he had separated them from the Heathen to be his peculiar People, to maintain the knowledge and fear of the true God among men; to which they could not do a greater prejudice, than to prefer the service of Idols before him; for this was in effect to tell the

World, that they held Idols to be better Masters and greater Benefactors than their God, whom they had try'd and known by many years experience. This indeed was the obvious Sense which People would put upon such their practice. Than which, as nothing could be more derogatory to the honour of God, so nothing could be more false and flanderous; it being evident by abundance of instances, that their Piety and Prosperity, and their Idolatry and Adversity always went together. God had expressly stipulated with them to afford them his Protection, as they should yield him their Obedience; the very Land in which they dwelt, was given them upon no other condition; the former Inhabitants were cast out by reason of their vile Idolatries and Abominations, and *Israel* was planted in their room with the character of a Holy People, and servants of the true God. When they had lost this character, they had fairly forfeited their Land, and were justly banished, and mingled among the Heathen, whose Sins and Impieties they had practised. Such were the very Articles of the Covenant, by which they held their Inheritance. They were often put in mind of them, and admonished to beware of falling into and persisting in such Sins, as would incur the forfeiture of God's Protection.

AND therefore with just indignation it is, that God demands here, by the Prophet *Ezekiel*, with what face any Men, *Israelites* or Strangers, could apply to him for relief and comfort in their Distress, when their Hearts were attached to the love of their Idols: Since he has made such plain Declarations, and even common sense might serve to inform them, that he cannot be favourable to them, so long as they are so wickedly affected. For this would be to encourage

courage and support them in the breach of his own Laws, which is inconsistent with his Wisdom, Holiness, Truth, and all his Attributes.

AN D therefore however idolatrous and impious Men may prosper in the World, their prosperity cannot be the effect of God's Love and Approbation of them: But is given them either for the punishment of others, upon whom they exercise their Pride, Avarice, and Cruelty; or for their own greater Condemnation at last, while they receive so many good things, and will not see the Hand which exhibits them; though it be far more evidently the cause of them, than those stupid Idols, to which they most absurdly and wrongfully ascribe them.

BUT I must not forget to observe, that the words of my Text are a Reproof, not only to those who practise external Idolatry, but likewise to those who are under the dominion of their own Lusts and Passions, which carry them away as strongly from the love of God, as if they were acted by a Legion of evil Angels. In this sense the words are of great Latitude, and serve for a proper admonition to us all, to take heed that we offend not God by Self-love, by doing our own Will. Every stubborn presumptuous Sinner sets up the Idol of his Lust in his own Heart, and when he comes to enquire of God, he shall have no other answer than what such an Idolater deserves. When he offers up his Prayers, or hears the divine Word, or performs any other religious Duty, God accepts him not as his Servant, nor admits him to any filial Communion with him, but sets his face against him, and regards him as an Alien and a Rebel, because he carries a strange God in his Heart,

who has the prerogative of his Affections, to whose commands he yields an unlimited Obedience.

THIS concerns us all to take notice of it; for it may be any Man's Case, who lives under the most pure dispensation of Religion, where there is no Image in the Church, no Invocation of Saints or Angels, and yet the Worshipper may be a damnable Idolater. If he is full of the love of himself, and of the World, if he lives in any habitual Sin, which is flatly contrary to the known Will of God; if he slight any duty, which the word of God declares to be of great importance, and necessary to Salvation; if he be of that incorrigible Spirit, as when his sin is reproved, to swell with indignation at his Reprover, to dissemble it and deny it, or to ransack the storehouse of Sophistry to defend it: If he be got into that strong hold of hardened Offenders, *that when he is convinced, he will not own his Convictions*: This Man is a spiritual Idolater, his Heart is the Temple, or rather the Castle of his Idols, for there he fortifies them so, that nothing may dislodge them; he can be pleased with the Stumbling-block of his Iniquity, though it lies open to his eyes, and to the view of all the World. And therefore he ought to apply to himself the answer of God in this fourteenth of *Ezekiel*. *When such a man comes to make his address to me, in the exercise of any religious Duty, I will set my face against him, and let him know, that he is not of the number of my obedient Children.*

SINCE then any one Idol enthroned in our Heart, any unmortified Lust which reigns there, will avert the Face of God, and hinder the acceptance of all our Duties; let this recommend an universal Obedience to the divine Law. Let us offer up in Sacrifice to God,

God, every Affection which is contrary to his Will, and not be loth to see it, but rejoice in the discovery, that we may approve our selves unto him as those that love him with all their Heart, *i.e.* are entirely devoted to do and suffer all things according to his good pleasure, after the example of him, who in the most terrible agony submitted and said, *not mine, but thy will be done*, even Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom with, &c.





# SERMON LXXXIV.

*On the Seventeenth Sunday after TRINITY.*

E V E N I N G.

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EZEKIEL xviii. 31, 32.

*Cast away from you all your Transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new Heart and a new Spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn your selves, and live ye.*



*N* this Chapter the Almighty is pleased to expostulate with the Jews upon the account of a Saying, which was so common in their mouths, that it was become a proverb, viz. *The Fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the Childrens teeth are set on edge.* By which they plainly meant, That the calamities of war and captivity which they suffered under the reigns of *Jeboiakim, Jeconiah, and Zedekiah*, were brought upon them, not by their own, but their Ancestors sins.

THIS

THIS Proverb the Divine Oracle forbids them to use any more; and that for several reasons.

I. BECAUSE that in the use of it, they arraigned the justice of God. *The house of Israel, says Ezekiel, crieth out upon the way of the Lord, that it is not equal.* They said it was very hard, very unreasonable, that they should suffer the punishment of sins which their forefathers had committed many years ago, before they were born into the World, of which they were neither authors nor instruments; and were sorry for them, but never had the power or opportunity to prevent them.

II. BY this Saying they shifted off the blame from themselves, as if they had done nothing to incense the Divine Wrath against them. For tho' they are characterized by *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* as a most corrupt generation of men, yet we hear how blind they were to their own demerits: Their Fathers, and not they, had eaten fower grapes; they had done nothing to set their own teeth on edge. This was an odious degree of self-conceit and partiality to themselves. They were sick unto death, and could not find out their disease, nor hear of repentance, tho' the Prophets were always telling them they must repent or perish.

III. BY this Proverb the Jews confirmed one another in their old evil courses, as thinking it to no purpose to change for the better. ' For, said they, ' we must suffer what our Fathers Sins have merited. ' The Prophets prophesied the same things to them ' as they do now to us. And therefore if their visions ' were true, all that we can do, cannot prevent the ' accomplishment of them. The Decree is gone forth, ' the Sentence is passed upon us, and cannot be avoided.

‘ avoided. So that since we cannot undo what our Fathers have done, we must be content to expect the issue, and need not trouble our selves about it, for our own concern will make it neither better nor worse.’ This seems to me to have been one meaning which the Jews had in this Proverb. Which justly moved God to lay an interdict upon it, that it might be utterly dropt and buried in oblivion. For so long as it spoke this sense, and kept up this persuasion in the People, all that God and his Prophets could offer, would never be able to lead them to amendment of life. ‘ If we must suffer, said they, for the sins of our parents, our own better lives will not rescue us from suffering.’

THIS was a desperate conclusion, and yet it seems not to be wholly without ground. We can hardly hear this Proverb I am speaking of, and not call to mind that clause of the second Commandment, where God threatens to visit the iniquities of the Fathers upon the Children unto the third and fourth Generation. And there are a great many facts to confirm this. There was a sower Fruit eaten by our first Parents, which hath set all our teeth on edge. And some bold Men, in reasoning upon this case, have irreverently asserted with the Jews here before us, that this way of God was unequal. But if this be so, there can be no such thing as Equity in any of the ways of men; for there is no man living in any Country or Kingdom upon Earth, but he may, by breaking Laws and Covenants, forfeit any of the good things of life for himself and his heirs for ever: This is what happens every day some where or other; and any Government is so far from being thought unreasonable for taking such forfeitures, that it is well known

known there can be no Government without them. Neither God nor Man can inflict a considerable punishment upon Parents, but their Children must in some measure feel the smart of it.

BUT here we must carefully distinguish between those calamities which Parents bring upon their Children, and those which God sends upon them for the Sins of their Parents. If any Man by laziness or lewdness, by an indiscreet management of his Estate, by foolish forfeitures, by riotous spending, drinking, gaming, and the like, reduces his Family from a comfortable livelyhood to a state of beggary; if by reason of his debaucheries his children have a sickly constitution, an ill education, a load of dishonour and contempt thrown upon them: Such poverty, infirmity, irreligion, or infamy of children, cannot be called God's visitation of them for the Sins of their Parents; but it is plainly such a portion as their Parents have directly provided for them, and entailed upon them. The Divine Visitation properly imports an enquiry which the righteous God makes after some sin, either secretly committed, or coloured over with the appearance of justice, or so past over as that it might be thought to have escaped the penalty due to it. And the punishment which attends such visitation is of that sort, that, by what means and instruments soever it is inflicted, yet we may plainly see the will of God in it, and that his hand brings it to pass. But now in the instances I have given of Children's smarting for the Sins of their Parents, the Divine Providence is not at all concerned. The Parents are the natural, necessary, and immediate Authors of their Children's sufferings, and that very contrary to the will of God, who is continually striving with them, by the ministry of his word,

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word, to turn them from such ruinous courses; and many times rescues such children, as brands out of the fire, from the pit of destruction into which their Parents vices were ready to plunge them.

SO that in many cases, we see the sufferings of Children cannot be called God's visitations of them for the sins of their Parents, but are directly owing to the Parents themselves, being the immediate, unavoidable consequences of their doings.

WE must not however forget, that, besides the second Commandment, there are many other places of Holy Writ, where God threatens to punish Children for the sins of their Parents, and the historical accounts of it show, that such threatenings have been put in execution. Thus God charged the *Israelites*, that in their wars with the *Midianites*, the *Canaanites*, the *Amalekites*, they should kill and slay them all, even to the least sucking child: Thus he destroyed the old World, the Cities of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, and a great many other places. But that which concerns us most to take notice of upon this occasion, is his threatening denounced by *Nathan* to his beloved King *David*, *2 Sam. xii.* *Because*, says he, *thou hast killed Uriah with the sword, therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house.* And I think it will be difficult to find any one of his Successors Kings of *Judah*, who did not either come to an untimely end, or had not some secret conspiracy or open war against him, to make him sit uneasie upon his Throne. Thus the sin of their forefather was plainly visited upon them. But several of them did worse than meerly suffer for it; they imitated and exceeded it, which still aggravated their own and their Peoples calamities. Particularly *Manasseh* was such an offender this way, that he

is set up and pointed out as the principal cause of the Babylonian captivity. *He shed innocent blood*, says his History, 2 Kings xxi. till he had filled Jerusalem with it, from one end to another. He caused his children to pass thro' the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hin-nom, 2 Chron. xxxiii. and used enchantments and witchcrafts, and dealt with familiar Spirits and Wizards, in which infernal arts he used human sacrifices after the manner of the Heathen: Which provoked God to declare that he would stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Abab, i. e. he would send Judah into captivity as well as Israel. And tho' Manasseh's affliction (for he was bound with fetters and carried to Babylon) brought him to a severe repentance, and his repentance prevailed with God to restore him again to his Country and Kingdom, yet the sentence which his sins had drawn upon his People was never reversed, but still more confirmed upon several occasions. Thus 2 Kings xxiii. after a high *Encomium* of Josiah's reign, it follows, *Notwithstanding the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations which Manasseh had provoked him withal. But he said, I will remove Judah out of my sight, as I have removed Israel*, i. e. by captivity. Again, in the next Chapter, when the captivity was begun under Jeboiakim, *Surely, says the Sacred Text, at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, and for the innocent blood which he shed, which the Lord would not pardon.* 3. In Jer. xv. 4. *I will, says God, cause them to be removed into all Kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the Son of Hezekiah King of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.*

ALL this amounts to a sufficient proof, not only of the general doctrine, *that God visits the iniquities of Parents and Governors upon their Children and Subjects*, but that it was the very case in the captivity of Judah, which was very much owing to the provocations of *Manasseh*.

THIS the Jews of those times, who were sufferers in it, were fully apprized of, for the sayings of the Prophets to this purpose were well known to them; and upon such sayings they seem to have grounded this Proverb, *that the Fathers had eaten sower grapes, and the childrens teeth were set on edge*. And this was so much their persuasion from the beginning to the end of the Chaldean War, that we meet with a saying very like this, *Lam. v. 7. Our Fathers have sinned and are not, and we have born their iniquities*.

BUT *Jeremiah*, who wrote this sentence, censures the Proverb in much the same terms with *Ezekiel*; which shows that both sayings are not to be taken in the same sense. *Jer. xxxi. 29. In those days*, says he, speaking of the time when God's wrath should cease towards *Israel*, and he would receive them again to favour, *they shall say no more, The Fathers have eaten a sower grape, and the childrens teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eateth the sower grape, his teeth shall be set on edge*. This is the summary rule of God's Dispensations. Let us now hear how he explains it more at large in this xviii. of *Ezekiel*, which will set the whole of his Visitations in a due light.

FIRST then, God begins his explanation with asserting his supreme and universal dominion over all mankind; *All Souls*, says he, *as well of parents as of children, are mine: And the rule of my dealings with them*

*them shall be this, that the wicked shall die, and the righteous shall live.*

NEXT he proceeds to instruct us, who he means by the righteous and the wicked. ' If, says he, a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right; if he be religious without superstition or idolatry, no adulterer, nor polluted with other carnal lusts; if he take care to be first honest, and then charitable; to be so far from oppressing or outraging any man; that he readily pays his debts, renders to all men their due, feeds the hungry, cloaths the naked, and in other things walks according to my Laws and Statutes; 'tis no matter of what parentage he is descended, honourable or despicable, good or evil; I promise him my blessing, he is my servant, he shall surely live.' This is the first character.

THE next is, of the Son of such an excellent person; ' if he should prove degenerate; a robber, a murderer, a whoremonger, an idolater: If he oppresses those that are under him, and denies payment of his just debts: If he has no bowels of compassion for the poor and needy; if he uses frauds and extortions in his dealings; the merits of his righteous Father shall avail him nothing, but he shall die for his own abominations, his blood shall be upon his own head.'

THE third decision is, concerning a Child of this ungracious Son. ' If, says God, this wicked man should beget a son, who seeing all his father's sins, and considering their destructive consequences, avoids them, and does all the duties contained in the first character, he shall fare never the worse for being the son of a wicked father; ruin and destruction shall be far from him; he shall surely live.'

AFTER these, follow two decisions of the case of the same persons in two different conditions. The first is, of a man who having been a wicked liver, repents of the Sins which he has committed, and turns from his evil ways to do that which is lawful and right; of such a one God pronounces, ‘ That he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, shall not be mentioned unto him, nor rise up in judgment against him: But in his righteousness that he hath done, in that shall he live.’

THE second case is, of a righteous man, who falls from his good ways, to the abominations of the wicked. ‘ Shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done, shall be blotted out: In his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sins that he hath committed, in them shall he die.’ These two cases are repeated and inculcated, for the fuller confirmation of them, and to make the deeper impression upon the hearers.

FROM these several cases, thus stated and resolved, two things are inferr’d.

*First, THAT* God neither saves nor destroys children in respect to their parents; but just as their own personal doings shall deserve.

*Secondly, THAT* any man, by changing his course of life, changes his doom in respect of rewards or punishments.

BUT here, after all, it may be demanded with the objectors in this Chapter, *Why? doth not the Son bear the iniquity of the Father?*

TO which I answer, That when children continue to provoke God, as their Fathers had done before them, by committing such sins as are mentioned in this

this Chapter, then they must expect that the judgments which were threatned to their Fathers, shall be poured out upon them, and that more abundantly, as they have had longer warnings of them. And that this was the case of these very Jews to whom *Ezekiel* prophesied, is evident from their History. They were a corrupt seed of evil-doers, they chose to fill up the measure of their Fathers iniquities, rather than to hearken to the voice of the Lord their God, and recover his favour and protection, by doing those things which he commanded them by the mouth of his Holy Prophets. What enormities were there, which this Generation was not guilty of? They would be tedious to enumerate, they are easily seen, they fill up every page of the Prophets. And what did God require of these men, in order to be reconciled to them? No more but this: ‘ Turn you from your evil ways, and I will turn from the fierceness of mine anger: Do you forbear to provoke me with your Impieties, and I will forbear to punish you with my Judgments.’

HERE was a gracious door of repentance opened to these Sinners for their escape; and we see in my Text that the Prophet held it open to the last, even to the beginning of their desolation. *Cast away from you all your transgressions, and make you a new heart and a new Spirit: For why will ye die, O house of Israel?* ‘ Are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? ‘ Do not I offer you fair, cheap, and easie conditions of reconciliation? And after long waiting and importunate sollicitations, ye refuse to comply with them. ‘ Therefore the hardship of your sufferings lies at your own doors.

THE plea which these men urged, to excuse themselves from repenting, had more of sullen humour, than any good reason in it. ‘ Our God, said they, has told us, that he visits the iniquities of Fathers upon their Children; and he hath said expressly, that he will cast us out of his sight, for the provocations of our King *Manasseb*. Therefore our Repentance will not save us.’ This was a sullen, wrangling way of arguing; and what they knew to be flatly contrary both to the general method of God’s dealings, and to the particular overtures which he had made since that threatening. They knew that all God’s threatenings were conditional, not to be executed, but in case of impenitence. They knew moreover, that God had solemnly and frequently promised them, by these two Prophets, *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*, that if they would repent, they should still live happily in their Land of *Canaan*. Had he told them before that their *Manasseb*’s abominations had merited all the plagues of sword, famine, pestilence, and captivity; How much should this danger have recommended their escape? How eagerly should they have embraced the hand, which was graciously offer’d to pluck them from the brink of destruction?

WHEN I hear them murmuring at God, and taxing him with cruelty, for threatening to account with them for their ancestors debts, methinks I hear the transaction between the Lord and the unprofitable Servant, as ’tis represented in the Gospel. ‘ Lord, says the servant, I have not improved your Talent, for I was afraid I should not satisfie you, as knowing you to be a hard Master, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not straw’d. Say you so? says his Lord. Well; tho’ I

do

‘ do not allow the character you give of me, yet I’ll  
‘ take you at your word, and show you that your  
‘ own mouth hath condemned you. For if you took  
‘ me to be such an austere and exacting Master, you  
‘ should have used the more diligence to have pleased  
‘ me: But now you have used none. Wherefore such  
‘ a Master must, according to your own apprehension,  
‘ needs punish such a Servant.’ With the like reason  
might God have said to these *Jews*: ‘ Are you per-  
‘ suaded that I will accomplish in your Days the Judg-  
‘ ments wherewith I threatned to punish your sinful  
‘ Ancestors? Why then do you continue to provoke  
‘ me with the same Sins? Men who apprehend my  
‘ severity, as you do, will either hearken to my Ser-  
‘ vants the Prophets, and repent, or their blood will  
‘ be upon {their own head; they will be self-con-  
‘ demn’d whenever I punish them.’

WHEN the Scripture affirms that God visits the iniquities of parents upon their children, or in other words, that he transfers the punishment of one generation to another, this speaks the forbearance and long-suffering of God, how patiently he waits upon Sinners, to see if they will consider at last, and hearken to overtures of peace, and embrace the means of their own Salvation.

TO such children as repine at the justice of God for not taking vengeance of their sinful parents, belongs the confession of the prodigal Son; *Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son.* Such Children were unworthy to be born into the World: for they resemble the Heir of an Estate, who should say to his Father’s Creditor, ‘ Why did you not arrest my Father, and save me the trouble of paying his debt?’ The

generous Creditor answers, ‘ If I had arrested your Father, I had ruined you in him. For his Family’s sake I spared him, hoping to see his heir make a good use of my money. ’Tis true, I often threatned him, because I saw him addicted to such a course of life as tended to every thing that is dishonourable and calamitous. And now I come upon you his heir, because I see that, contrary to my desires and counsels, you tread in the same steps. However, I offer you as I did him, that if you will but approve your self a pious and virtuous man, I will not only forgive you the debt, but will do all that lies in my power to make you and yours a happy family.’

THIS is exactly the language of the Almighty to the Generation of *Israel* here before us. ‘ I have no pleasure in the death of a Sinner. I do not desire to take the rigour of the Law upon any of you. I will not require the Son to bear the iniquity of the Father, nor the Father to bear the Sins of his Children. Every one shall bear his own burden.’ This is what God expressly says in this xviiith of *Ezekiel*. And it is the meaning of all his Exhortations and Persuasives to repentance throughout the Bible. *He that doth righteousness, shall surely live, he shall not die.* He shall not die eternally. Neither shall he die a spiritual death. The sins of a man’s Ancestors or Descendents shall never trouble his conscience, if he has been no way the occasion of them, but has honestly done all that was incumbent upon him to prevent them, or to make satisfaction for them: Neither shall they subject such a man to the providential misfortunes of this life. I have explained before how the debaucheries of Parents may entail calamities upon their Children, which can by no means be stiled God’s

Visitations; he has no hand in them. I am now saying, that a pious and virtuous Son cannot be obnoxious to the Divine Justice for the sins of his Father: And consequently cannot suffer for them even in the things of this Life. I do not say, that he may not change his condition in various respects, that he may not be carried into captivity by the stream of a Visitation for his Father's iniquities; but I say that such a change shall not prove a real calamity to a Child who is in the favour of God. I appeal to the case of *Daniel* and his three Friends, who were carried away to *Babylon* in the first captivity under *Jeboiakim*. What could be a greater punishment than their sufferings? The first was cast into a den of Lions, the others into a fiery Furnace. Behold here how the piety of these Men prevailed over the demerits of their parents and governors. Their sufferings (I should say the formality of suffering) raised them to a threefold State of Glory: To be Princes in *Babylon*, to be Saints in Heaven, to be praised and admired throughout all the Earth. An incomparable seal of the truth of God's promise here before us, *that the righteous Son shall not die for the iniquity of his Father; he shall surely live.*

YOU think you are a sufferer for the Sins of your Parents; and you do well to think so. If any of them were robbers, murderers, whoremongers, oppressors of the poor and needy, &c. you have reason for your apprehension. But then, does this apprehension incite you to cry mightily to God, that he would not remember the iniquities of your Forefathers? Does it fill you with a concern to make satisfaction for their frauds and oppressions, by offering restitution where you think it is due, and by abounding

in your charity to the poor and needy? Does it arm you with a resolution to avoid those sins more especially, which have been, as I may say, hereditary in your Family? and to distinguish your self as much on the other hand, with the contrary virtues? These things are what God plainly requires of you in this Chapter, which if you honestly perform, you shall not suffer for the iniquities of your Forefathers.

CAST away therefore all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new Heart and a new Spirit, by a serious use of that efficacious medicine of the Soul, Repentance; whereby the Son of an impious Father, is made a Child of God; whereby the greatest Debtor to Divine Justice blots out all his transgressions, so that they shall not be once mention'd against him; whereby he that was once dead in sins and trespasses, shall be recovered to life, and live for ever, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom &c.





# SERMON LXXXV.

*On the Eighteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*

M O R N I N G.

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E Z E K. xx. 24.

*Because they had not executed my Judgments, but had despised my Statutes, and had polluted my Sabbaths, and their Eyes were after their Fathers Idols.*



HIS Chapter contains an expostulation of God with certain of the Elders of *Isra**el*, who came to the Prophet *Ezekiel*, in the time of their Captivity, to enquire of him, why God was so displeased with them, and what he would advise them to do to recover his Favour. The answer is, that this was a trifling and frivolous Question. They had no need of a new Revelation to teach them what it was that would obtain the Blessings, or bring down the Judgments of God upon them. They could not be ignorant of the Covenant which he had made with their Ancestors at the first, and which he had caused to be written, and constantly read and preached among them;

by which they might learn the things which he required them both to avoid and to observe, and how he would reward their Obedience, and punish their Transgressions. They might farther collect, from the ancient Records of their Nation, many Instances of the judgments and mercies which God exercised towards them, and others upon their account. How he covenanted with them in *Egypt* to rescue them from the slavery under which they groaned, to take them out of the midst of that idolatrous Nation, and plant them in a fruitful Land, and make them a free People, upon condition that he should be their God, and they should be his Servants. To this end he lift up his hand, and made bare his arm, in the divine Judgments which he poured out upon the *Egyptians*, to work their deliverance. But yet these wonderful works, in which God magnified his power to the confusion of all the Magicians and Idols of *Egypt*, could not persuade his People to fulfill their part of the Covenant, which was, to cast away the Idols of that Nation, and to have none other God besides him. This provoked him to threaten that he would leave them there, and suffer them to be Slaves to that People, whose Idols they adored. But in consideration of what he had already done, and the advances he had made towards their deliverance, whereby his name and power came to be much celebrated among the *Egyptians*, that they might not afterwards blaspheme him, as one that had undertaken more than he was able to accomplish, he constrained them to let his people depart from among them, and brought them by a miraculous Passage through the Red Sea, into the borders of *Arabia*, onwards of their Journey to the promised Land.

AND

AND here he gave them a body of Laws, which might distinguish them from the Heathen, to be a peculiar people to himself, and appointed them Sabbaths and Seasons of Rest from their bodily Labour, that they might have leisure to assemble together, and attend to the reading and preaching of these Laws. Nevertheless they proved very untractable Disciples; they profaned the Sabbaths, by doing their own pleasure upon them, and made very slow progress in learning the Will of God; and what they did learn, they made no conscience to observe; but despised the divine Statutes and Judgments, and their Heart went after their Taskmasters Idols.

SUCH was the behaviour of *Israel* in *Egypt* and the Wilderness; nor did the felicities of *Canaan* conduce much to the improvement of their Piety. This very Generation, whose Elders came to ask counsel of the Prophet *Ezekiel*, had violated the divine Laws, and polluted themselves with Idols as much as their Forefathers; and now they are in Captivity, receiving the reward of their Impieties, yet they cannot see, without a new Revelation by a Prophet, what it is that has brought their Calamities upon them. Whence we may observe,

I. How strangely wicked Men are apt to be infatuated and blinded with their Impieties, so that they will not acknowledge them to be the cause of their Sufferings.

II. That the natural and necessary cause of publick Calamities is Atheism, or a general neglect and contempt of the divine Majesty.

III. That there is no other way to remove such Calamities, but by restoring the Government of God amongst Men.

AND

AND if, Wicked Men are so prejudiced in favour of their sinful ways, that they are but seldom, and with great difficulty, brought to acknowledge them to be the meritorious cause of God's Visitations. *Wherefore is all this come upon us?* says idolatrous *Israel* in Captivity; and they ask this of their Prophet, when a succession of Prophets for many Generations had been constantly preaching to them this very Doctrine in my Text, *That if they were not careful to execute Justice and Judgment, if they despised God's Laws, and profaned his Sabbaths, and corrupted his Religion by Heresies and Idolatries, they should be rooted out of the Land of Canaan, and carried into Captivity among the Heathen.* And though *Judah* had seen *Israel* go before them, and actually dissolved and destroyed from being a Nation, for the multitude of their Impieties; yet when it came to their own turn to be carried away to *Babylon*, instead of reflecting on their ways, and seeing that they had trod in the same steps with their Brethren; they ask what they have done, and seem to wonder what it was that had so offended God against them, as to provoke him to cast them out of his sight.

THIS is an inexcusable, an amazing perverseness, that Men who have the divine Warnings continually rung in their Ears, and the punishment of their Sins set before their Face; that Men who daily see and hear how their own Sins are and have been punished in others, should be to seek for a Reason of their Punishments, when it comes to their own turn to suffer them. This, I say, is very amazing; I wish I could call it Strange, in one sense of that word, as it signifies Unusual. But, to the lamentable woe and misfortune of Mankind, it is too much the practice of every Age and Nation under Heaven.

WHEN-

WHENEVER it pleases God to visit a Nation with War, Pestilence, Famine, or some other grievous Judgment, (and he never inflicts any of these Judgments, but upon a Country polluted with some crying Sin) the Men that shall do the Office of the ancient Prophets, in assigning and pointing out such Sins as are the Cause of such Judgments, shall generally meet with the Treatment of the old Prophets, and be accounted as too superstitious, or disordered in their Heads, or dissatisfied with their own Share in the State of Affairs. And they shall not fail to be opposed, as They were, with a contrary Set of Prophets, who will smoothly proclaim Peace from Heaven, when God's Arm is made bare to punish, and the Cause of his Indignation is glaring and obvious.

THIS was the Complaint of old, that when the Hand of Divine Justice was lifted up, the People would not see the Rod, and him who had appointed it; but interpreted all their Calamities as the Effects of meer Chance, or natural Causes. Pestilences and immoderate Drought were ascribed to a particular Constitution of the Air; Wars and Invasions, to the Ambition of neighbouring Princes, who sought to add *Canaan* to the rest of their Dominions. Shipwrecks at Sea were occasioned by Storms and Tempests. All this is very true; but the fatal Error lay here, in resting in these as in the primary Causes, and looking no farther. Which is the Atheism that has always ruined the World; for it excludes God from the Government of it, and consequently provokes him to forsake it, and leave it to the Power of evil Angels to infest it.

BUT this may be something wide of the Matter in hand. The People we are speaking of, did not deny the Dispensations of God: they were sensible of his Judgments; but they were so favourable to their own Manners, as not to see that they had done enough to merit their Sufferings. How then could they reconcile them with the Justice and Goodness of God? Why, they often thought that they suffered for the Iniquities of their Forefathers. They have a Saying among them, *that all their Misfortunes receive some Aggravation from the sin of the golden Calf*, which their Ancestors made in the Wilderness: And this very Prophet *Ezekiel* complains of them, *that it was commonly said among them in his Days, that the Fathers had eaten fower Grapes, and the Childrens Teeth were set on edge.*

NOW it is well known that God has reserved to himself the Power of visiting the Iniquities of Parents upon their Children; but then it is of such as hate him, and so add their own Provocations to those of their Forefathers. As a wicked Father may avert the Wrath of God, and turn his Judgments into Blessings, if he will turn from the Evil of his former Ways; so the righteous Son of a wicked Father shall not bear his Parent's Iniquity: if he be not Partaker in his Guilt, neither shall he bear any Part of his Punishment. This is the Divine Sentence by our Prophet, ch. xviii. and it is most clearly and incontestably verified in the publick Face of Things here upon Earth. One Generation of Men is happy, and another calamitous, in proportion to the State of true Religion, and the Fear of God among them; as we shall see more at large under my

Id Head, which is this, THAT the natural and necessary Cause of publick Calamities is Atheism, or a general Neglect and Contempt of the Divine Majesty. The Truth of which has been so fully experienced, that none but very ignorant, or very perverse and froward People will dare to deny it. Even those Men who have been so weak, as in their Practice to walk contrary to God, and have flattered themselves that they should find their Pleasure or Profit in those Things which he has forbidden them, yet in their serious Discourses they have rarely justified such Practices; few of them have been hardy enough to deliver any Thing by Word or Writing, as a Rule of human Actions, but what is built upon this Foundation, that *God governs the World, and that he will render to every Man according to his Works.* How few are there, among the Men of abandoned Conscience, who would willingly have the World to act as they do? or care to write a Book of their own Morals, and recommend it to the Imitation of Mankind? On the contrary, how many wicked Parents have laid their most serious Commands, at the close of Life, upon their Children, to fear God and keep his Commandments? How many Malefactors have earnestly warned others to shun those Ways, which have brought them to Destruction? and confess in the Sense, and almost in the Words of my Text, that if they had but acted the honest Part, and kept the Sabbath, and refrained from the Idols of their own Imagination, it had been happy for them? And this bids fair for a Proof of the Sense of Mankind, that *our Calamities are owing to our want of the Fear of God.*

THERE

THERE are, I confess, a world of People, who are deceived by the Riches of wicked Men, and the Pleasures they take, and the Honours and Respects which are paid them, so far as to pronounce them happy. But that is more than these Men will say of themselves, if they have any Grains of sound Understanding; and if they have not, then they are wretched in this respect, that they want the Faculty of judging what real Happiness is; And this very Mask and Vizard of Happiness is commonly pluckt off by the Hand of Providence in a little time, and the Hypocrite exposed in his genuine Colours, as all serious Observers can testify: *For the Triumph and Joy of the wicked, says Zophar, Job xx. 5. is but for a Moment, and the Hypocrite's Hope shall perish;* and though for a time *he flourishes like a green Bay-tree,* as the Psalmist speaks, xxxvii. 35; yet his End is to be cut off at the last; and his Memory will be so obliterated, that the Place of his Habitation shall know him no more. *His Money, says the Prophet, Hag. i. 6. is put into a Bag that hath holes;* it is often squandered and consumed in an unaccountable manner.

THE like may be said of any Kingdom or Nation, whose Sins are predominant, and little or no Power of Religion to be seen among them. They may prosper for a while in the height of their Provocations. It is agreeable to God's Method of calling such People to Repentance, to give them time and space for it. He sends his Ministers to shew them the Evil of their Ways, and to denounce his Judgments against them, if they will not turn and repent: And if they prove deaf to his Warnings, he begins to let some few Arrows of his Displeasure fly among them, to convince them that he is in good earnest,

earnest, and that he is able to execute what he threatens. But if these lighter Afflictions work not the intended Reformation, then he pours out the Vials of his heavy and consuming Judgments, Pestilence, Famine, Sword, and the like, to root out incorrigible Sinners, and cast them out of his Sight. This has been God's Method with many once powerful Empires and Kingdoms, which have been gradually broken, and at last abolished and reduced to nothing, because they have degenerated from their first Piety and Virtue; and the Cry of their Sins has prevailed against that of their Prayers, and they have stood out incorrigible against all God's Dispensations both of Mercy and Judgment, which he has used to reclaim them.

For as I noted in the *III<sup>d</sup> Place*, THERE is no other way to remove such Calamities, but by putting away the Sins which occasioned them, and restoring the Government of God among Men.

THIS happy Change of Manners, and seasonable Return to Obedience, has rescued many a grievous Sinner as a Brand out of the Fire, and lengthened his Days, when the Sword of Divine Vengeance was just ready to cut him off, and preserved him a Name and Posterity upon Earth, and delivered him from having his Portion with Hypocrites, to be numbered with the Children of God.

THE Instances of this Salvation are very many: We read it in the Lives of those Men, who setting out and going far in the broad Ways of Destruction, have happily been stopt by some special Providence, and turned from *Darkness to Light, and from the Power of Sin and Satan unto God*. And they have afterwards lived in the constant Sense and Acknowledgment of

such their Conversion, and kissed the Rod which corrected them, and adored him who appointed it, and confessed, *that it was of the Lord's Mercies that they were not utterly consumed.*

THE like Conversions have changed the Fate and reversed the Doom of whole Kingdoms and Nations, and removed the Judgments which were ready to consume them. The History of *Israel* alone affords many Instances of these Dispensations. When their Sins against God had brought them very low, and subjected them to the Yoke of the Heathen round about them; yet by confessing their Iniquities, and putting away the strange Gods from among them, and serving the Lord, they had been either enabled, under the greatest Disadvantages, to overcome their Enemies, or else have found such Favour in their Eyes, that they have turned that Power which carried them into Captivity, to be the Means of their Restoration. Even the Prisons and Guards of the *Babylonians* could not detain them, when the humbled Captives were no longer Slaves to Idols; when they renewed their Vows of Obedience to their God in *Sion*, and sent their Hearts to *Jerusalem*, God caused all those that had led them away captive, to pity them, and work their Deliverance, and help them to rebuild that City and Temple, which they had formerly demolished and laid in Ruins.

ANOTHER obvious Instance of a blessed Change which People's turning to God has made in their Affairs, is that of the *Ninevites*, who hearing by the Preaching of *Jonah*, that they were doomed to Destruction in forty days time, had the Grace to believe it, and humbled themselves in the Dust, and cried mightily unto God to turn away from the

Fierce-

Fierceness of his Wrath, and spare them; by which Humiliation they obtained Deliverance, and prevented the Execution of the threatened Judgment.

AND we cannot doubt (since the best Histories assure us) that many other Cities and People, who were destitute of the Knowledge of the true God, yet seeking in their Dangers to atone him according to the best of their Understanding, and repairing those Breaches which wicked Men had made in their Ordinances of Piety and Justice, have by such their serious Endeavours obtained a merciful Deliverance from the Destruction which was breaking in upon them, and have raised their sinking Constitution, and animated it with new Life and Vigour for a longer Continuance.

UPON the whole, it is undeniably evident that God governs the World, and is the Dispenser of Prosperity and Adversity to the Inhabitants of it. For which end, all things which we call second Causes, obey him, and work together for our Comfort or Affliction, according as he in his Justice sees fit to direct them. From whence we must conclude,

I. THAT it is our best Policy to secure to ourselves the love and favour of God, which we can no otherways obtain but by keeping his Commandments. For such our Obedience he has made the condition of his Mercies and Loving-kindness towards us; and from the beginning of the World to this day, has verified this rule, That Righteousness exalteth a Nation, but that a Land defiled with Prophaneness and Immorality is cursed, and nigh to Destruction. All Histories and Annals of former times proclaim this truth, and teach us to know our good or bad circumstances, as certainly as if we had a thousand

Prophets sent to us with immediate Revelations. For they show us, by a multitude of examples, that *God has always honoured those that honour him, and cover'd those who despise him with shame and confusion of Face.*

II. WE conclude from what has been said, that it is our wisest way to consider Calamities, especially such as are plainly providential, as tokens of God's displeasure, and his visitations of our sins. For by Sin it was that Death first entred into the World, and all Calamities are part of the Empire and Dominion of this Death: and the more we sin, the more obnoxious we render our selves to this Dominion. Every offence against God, adds weight to the load of our misfortunes. It is our wisdom therefore, to abstain as much as may be, from such Offences. And sure it is enough to deter us from them, when we consider *Death as the wages of Sin.* When we seriously lay it to Heart how much our Sins have separated us from God, the fountain of all Happiness, this should make us careful to heal the separation, by drawing nigh unto him in holy Meditations and Prayers, by confessing and honouring him before men, and by yielding the Obedience of dutiful Children to all his Commandments. For

*Lastly, NOTHING else can appease God's Wrath, and procure the removal of any Judgment which is inflicted on us.* The Prophets of *Israel* were wont to assure their People, that it was in vain for them to seek redress of their grievances any other ways, so long as they suffered Sin to have the dominion over them. For this it was that God afflicted them, and called them to Repentance, and if they continued impenitent, his Hand would be stretched out still to smite them till they turned to him. HE

HE had for many Ages sent his Prophets among them, and reproved them for their gross corruption of his Religion and Laws. He had upbraided them with their partial decisions in their Courts of Judicature, and how they perverted Truth and Justice by their shameful Bribery; and how they despised the Assemblies of his Worship, and regarded his Sabbaths no more than common days; but did whatsoever seemed good in their own eyes. For these things he threatned to remove them out of his sight, and scatter them among the Heathen: which Threatning, after many years Patience and tryal of them to no purpose, he was compell'd by their incorrigibleness to execute upon them.

THESE things are written for our instruction; let no man think that this was a particular case, or that Christians have more indulgence from God than the Jews, to transgres the Laws of Truth and Righteousness. Such Laws are immutable, and the same unchangeable God enjoyns them upon us, and exacts our Obedience to them. He has the same vials to pour out upon our defiled Land, and we have the like enjoyments, lives, estates, and liberties to lose by his just Visitations.

LET us not then flatter our selves, that Prosperity will dwell in our guilty Habitations, if we go on to banish Religion and Virtue, Truth and Justice from amongst us. Neither let us cast away our portion of good things in this life, by such doings as will at the same time bereave us of the comfort of God's favour and a good Conscience.

BUT we have a *Canaan* too, and a *Jerusalem* not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens: Into which *nothing can enter that defileth, or worketh Abomination,*

*or maketh a lye.* For it is the peculiar Kingdom of the God of Truth and Holiness. Blessed are all they that shall be found to resemble him in these Attributes; for such he will own for his elect and beloved Children, and gather them into his celestial Family, to the Society of his holy ones, who are sanctified and redeemed by the Blood of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, &c.





# SERMON LXXXVI.

*On the Eighteenth Sunday after TRINITY.*

E V E N I N G.

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E Z E K I E L xxiv. 24.

*Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign: according to all that he hath done, shall ye do: and when this cometh, ye shall know that I am the Lord God.*

  
EFORE we enter into the matter of this Chapter, we must, for the better understanding of it, observe two things, which I have formerly intimated. *First*, That the author of it was now an Exile in the province of *Babylon*, being of the number of those *Jews* whom *Nebuchadnezzar* carried away in his second invasion of *Judaea* in the reign of *Jeconiah*. *Secondly*, That he and his brethren of the captivity were very much divided in their opinion about the duration of it. For they were persuaded that their Kingdom, their City of *Jerusalem*, and their Temple there, should never be destroyed. And in this persuasion they were confirmed by many false Prophets, who undertook to prove this, both from the promises of

God made to their forefathers, and from immediate revelations which he had made to themselves. Thus *Hananiah* publickly declared in the Temple, that the Lord God of *Israel* had said, *I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon, &c.* *Jer. xxviii.* And to the same purpose prophesied *Ahab* the son of *Kolaiah*, *Zedekiah* the son of *Maaseiah*, *Shemaiah* the *Nebelamite*, and other false Prophets, who were amongst the Exiles: Who caused them to repine at their hard fortune, and to esteem their countrymen, who remained in *Judea*, much happier than themselves, and to think of nothing but a speedy return to their families and possessions.

BUT now *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel* read them a quite contrary doom from the mouth of God. The former expostulated with King *Zedekiah*, and with all the Priests and People, saying, ‘ Why will ye die by sword, famine, and pestilence, which ye bring upon your selves by an ineffectual opposition which ye make to the army of the *Chaldeans*? Hearken not to the Prophets which tell you, ye shall not serve the King of *Babylon*; for they prophesie a lye. If they be true Prophets, and if the word of the Lord be with them, let them now make intercession to the Lord of Hosts, that the vessels in the Temple and in the Palace at *Jerusalem*, be not carried to *Babylon*. *Jerem. xxvii.* The *Chaldeans* which fight against this City, shall come and set it on fire, and burn the houses upon whose roofs ye have offered incense unto *Baal*, and poured out drink-offerings unto other Gods. *Jerem. xxxii.* The Lord will make *Jerusalem* heaps, a den of dragons: He will make the Cities of *Judah* desolate, without an inhabitant. Because ye have polluted his house with idols, and commit-  
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ted abominations in it, he will cast it down even to the ground. You have not suffered the Land to enjoy her sabbaths according to the Law of the Lord, *Exod. xxiii.* which commands you, saying, Six years shall ye sow your Land, and gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie still: And what it produces that year, shall be for the poor people, and the beasts of the field. Now you have not observed the sabbatical year, but have plowed and sowed in it, as if there were no such Law which I have mentioned: Therefore ye shall go into captivity, that your Land may enjoy her sabbaths; according to the number of your transgressions of this kind, so shall your captivity be, even seventy years shall your Land lie desolate, that it may enjoy the number of sabbatical years, which are due to it by the divine Law.

MOREOVER the Lord God of *Israel* made a covenant with your fathers, that at the end of every seven years, they should release and set at liberty every man of the *Hebrews* their brethren, who had been sold unto them for servants: But neither you nor your fathers have obeyed the words of this Law. Therefore behold the Lord proclaims liberty to the sword, to the famine, and to the pestilence to devour you, and ye shall be removed into all the Kingdoms of the Earth, where ye shall live in a state of slavery and captivity, because you have enslaved your brethren contrary to the express command of your God, *Jer. xxxiv.*

THUS *Jeremiah*; and to the same purpose is *Ezekiel's* prophecy. And not only the event proved them to be true Prophets, but their discourses were all along grounded upon good reason. We have heard what

what reasons *Jeremiah* gave, why *Jerusalem* and the Temple should be burnt with fire, why *Judæa* should lie desolate seventy years, and the chief inhabitants of it be slaves and captives during that time. Let us now hear this doom confirmed by the mouth of the other witness, the Prophet *Ezekiel* here before us.

*EZEKIEL*'s method of instructing the people, was by representing to them those things in type and effigy, which God was about to bring upon them. We know that *Jeremiah* did not neglect this way of exhibiting the scenes of God's impending Judgments, but *Ezekiel* most abounded in it. Thus chap. iv. instead of discoursing to his incredulous brethren, about the siege which the *Chaldeans* would shortly lay to *Jerusalem*, he acts it, by dumb signs, as we say, but such signs as spoke even plainer than words. *First*, he draws a plan of the City, against which he raises a fort, casts up a mount, describes a camp and battering rams round about it. Then he lays him down before it, and looks wistfully upon it, for several days, and gets him a small stock of coarse bread and water, which he weighs and measures every day for his subsistence, to intimate the famine which should happen thro' scarcity of provisions during the siege.

IN the next Chapter, to denote the utter desolation of his Country, he takes a rafor, and shaves off the hair of his head and beard. This hair he divides by weight into three equal parts: The first of which he burns in the midst of the City, or plan of *Jerusalem*, which he had drawn: Signifying thereby, that a third part of the inhabitants should perish by famine and pestilence. The second part of his hair he cuts to pieces with a knife, intimating that so many of the citizens should be slain with the sword, just after they had

had escaped out of the City. This was remarkably fulfilled in the slaughter of *Zedekiah's* sons, and the rest of his retinue. The third part of his hair he scattered in the wind, in token of the dispersion of those who escaped pestilence, famine, and sword, how they should be scattered abroad in various Countries. But before he disposed of these last hairs, he took a few of them, and bound them up in the skirts of his cloaths, as much as to say, *A remnant shall be left in Judea*, and so there was, under *Gedaliah*. But then he presently took them out again, and cast them into the fire, to denote the conspiracy which *Ismael* should form against *Gedaliah*, which occasioned the utter ruin of that poor remainder of *Jews*, which *Nebuzaradan* left in their native Country; for part went down into *Egypt*, where they were all consumed, and the rest were entirely carried away to *Babylon*.

Thirdly, THE exiles at *Babylon* insulted *Ezekiel* with this proverb, or common saying, *The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth*: And what was the meaning of this? Why, they pretended that the time wherein the predictions of their captivity should have been fulfilled, was expired. They saw *Jerusalem* still inhabited, and under the Government of its own King; which made them repine at their own hard fortune, and think those who remained at *Jerusalem*, in a much better condition than themselves. St. *Jerom* says, some repented that they had followed the counsel of *Jeremiah*, and surrendered themselves to the *Babylonians*, whereas their own *Jerusalem*, the ruin of which he had prognosticated, was still in being: Therefore *Ezekiel*, to give them a lively vision of the downfall of their City, packed up his goods, as those use to do who remove from one place to another; and in

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the evening he digged thro' the wall of his house, and carried out his goods upon his back at the breach, in the presence of many of his people, who observed his motions; and he covered his face that he might not see the ground. And when they asked him what he meant by all this, he assured them that he was acting the Prince in *Jerusalem*. ‘ For, says he, this is ‘ the decree of God, that your King shall go forth of ‘ his palace in the twilight, bearing a burden upon ‘ his shoulder, and shall break through a wall of his ‘ buildings, that he may pass like a servant unobserv- ‘ ed of the enemy: For which end he shall cover his ‘ face to disguise himself, so that he shall not see the ‘ ground with his eyes. Nevertheless, says God, I ‘ will cast my net upon him, and he shall be taken ‘ in my snare; and I will bring him to *Babylon*, to ‘ the Land of the *Chaldeans*, yet shall he not see ‘ it, tho’ he shall die there.’

HERE we may note with *Josephus*, *Ant. B. x. c. 9.* that *Zedekiah*, who had no mind to hearken to the prophetick warnings of his captivity, rejected both *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*, because the former had told him, *xxxiv. 3.* that his eyes should behold the eyes of the King of *Babylon*; whereas the other says here, that he shall not see *Babylon*, tho’ he should die there. These two predictions *Zedekiah* took to be inconsistent, and so believed neither, nor any thing else that the authors said. But this showed how willing he was to be an Infidel. For when *Ezekiel* said he should die in *Babylon* without seeing it, he might have concluded that this was very possible, he first losing his eyes before he was carried thither, as indeed it afterwards hap- pened to him.

LET us come now to this xxiv. chap. of *Ezekiel*, whence my Text is taken, and see how the Prophet continues, by pertinent parables and representations, to shew the accomplishment of his predictions. At the beginning he affirms, that in the ninth year of *Zedekiah's* reign, the tenth month, the tenth day of the month, God revealed it to him, that upon this same day *Nebuchadnezzar* begun the siege of *Jerusalem*. Now if we compare this with the history of the siege, as it is related *2 Kings* xxv. and *Jerem.* lii. we shall find that in all three places, the year, month, and day, of this occurrence, are exactly the same. This being revealed to *Ezekiel*, who was then in *Babylon*, above five hundred miles distant from *Jerusalem* at the very instant when it happened, was a great confirmation both to himself and all the people, that the Spirit of God spoke by him. And to convince gainsayers of this, was the great use which he was to make of it; as God directs at the end of this Chapter, saying, ' When he that is escaped from the siege, shall come and tell thee and thy people how all things happened in it, as I have now revealed them, then thy mouth shall be opened, and thou shalt no more speak by dumb signs, but deliver thy predictions in plain words; which the people comparing with the event, and finding the exact agreement, shall be convinced that I the Lord have sent thee to say and do all these things.'

AT the same time God commands him to intimate the straitness of the siege, and the manifold calamities which would attend it, by the parable of a pot boiling over a fire, in which were sodden the several joints and pieces of the choicest sheep of the flock. This pot, as he presently shews, denotes *Jerusalem*. The boiling of it, signifies the grievous judgments, that of fire

fire especially, which would consume the City. By the good pieces and choice of the flock are meant, the King, Nobles, and principal men, who were shut up in it, being gathered together from all parts of *Judea*, with their money and portable goods, to escape being plundered in defenceless places by the irresistible forces of the *Chaldeans*. Of the same men he speaks when he says, *Take the meat out piece by piece, let no lot fall upon any of it*, i. e. The principal men shall be drawn out of the City, and slain by the *Chaldeans*; none of them shall escape by lot, as the custom of conquerors in other cases is, to cast lots what proportion of their captives shall be saved. There shall be no use of lots here; for they shall all be slain.

HE proceeds: *Spice the pot well; make it very savoury, for so shall the Chaldeans fall upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as men of a sharp appetite fall to a savoury well-dressed dish of meat. Let the bones be burnt; the fire shall be so fierce as to consume the very bones as well as the flesh, the brick and stone, silver and gold, iron and steel of the City, as well as the bodies of men, and their combustible goods. Then set it empty upon the coals: After an entire riddance of inhabitants, houses, and goods of all sorts, behold, nothing remains but the ashes and rubbish of a City, which once was, but now is no more.*

WITH this description of the calamities of their siege and captivity, God intermingles his reasons for inflicting them. *Jerusalem, says he, has been a bloody city: This is her common character; so she had made her self, partly by the blood of the Prophets, partly by the blood of innocents offered in the sacrifices of her idols, partly in the violences and outrages which the higher sort committed upon the meanner people.*

people. *Secondly*, She had wearied her self with lies; with idols, which are commonly and justly styled vanities; with such wanton entertainments and vicious diversions as her idols were patrons of, and for the sake of whose patronage she chose to be their worshipper. She had wearied her self with lies in the more usual sense of the word, as it was the common practice of her citizens, in their words and actions, to cheat and defraud one another. *Jeremiah* and one or two more good men, were horribly nauseated and wearied with these enemies of all righteousness. *Oh*, says that Prophet, chap. ix. *that I had but a cave in the wilderness, any Hermit's lodge, whither I might retire and sequester my self from my people; for they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. They bend their tongue like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon earth. Every brother utterly supplants: every neighbour walks with flanders. They have taught their tongue to speak lies, they weary themselves to commit iniquity. Their habitation is in the midst of deceit; thro' deceit they refuse to know the Lord.*

THIS villainous spirit of falsehood and wrong they carried beyond their ordinary dealings, as high as their tribunals, which they filled with perjuries: And *the* they readily swore by the living God, yet trust them not, says *Jeremiah*, but rather be assured that they swear falsely; which they were so accustomed to do, that there was no execution of justice and judgment in this generation, as the same Prophet affirms.

*Thirdly*, A farther reason of *Jerusalem's* desolation, was the overflowing of her carnal lusts. *In thy filthiness is lewdness*, says God here by *Ezekiel*. To explain which, both our Prophets declaim often and aloud against the adulteries and whoredoms of this generation:

tion: Which words, tho' sometimes used metaphorically, to signify idolatries, yet are often limited in these prophecies, to the obvious and literal meaning. Indeed such lusts were the fruits of their idolatry; they were practised in obedience to the will and pleasure, the spirit and genius of their idols. *How shall I pardon thee for this?* says God to *Jerusalem*, Jer. v. *Thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no Gods.* Now observe the effects of this apostasy: *When I had fed them to the full, when they had peace and plenty, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots houses.* They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neigbed after his neighbour's wife: Thus *Jeremiah*. Now hear how *Ezekiel* arraigns *Jerusalem* of crimes of the like nature, chap. xxii. *In thee have they discovered their fathers nakedness: in |thee have they humbled her that was set apart.* And one hath committed abomination with his neighbour's wife, and another hath lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law, and another in thee hath humbled his sister, his father's daughter. What need many words? The Prophets compare this City to *Sodom*, and the historical Books show, that they had the highest reason for this comparison.

THUS far of *Jerusalem*'s crying sins: In the next place observe the aggravations of them, as they are set forth in this xxiv chap. of *Ezekiel*. *I would have purged her, says God, but she refused to be purged.* Her great scum (alluding to the metaphor of a boiling pot) is not gone out of her. How undeniable is this? How zealous was God to reform *Jerusalem*, by the incessant calls and warnings of his Prophets? by the lighter corrections of sword, famine, and pestilence? light, in comparison of this siege and captivity! by the example

ple of her sister *Samaria*, the ten Tribes, who went into captivity before her, for the like provocations ! by plain denunciations, and gradual approaches of her own captivity. All which were so far from making sensible impressions upon her, that her scum, her grossest corruptions, remained to the last in the midst of her. *She set her blood, the innocent blood which she had shed, upon the top of a rock ; she poured it not upon the ground ; she covered it not with dust.* She was impudent and barefaced in her cruelties : So far from seeking to excuse them, that she committed them in defiance of one of her most known Laws, *that the land could not be cleansed from blood, but by the blood of him that shed it :* And in contempt of that precept *Levit. xvii. That the blood of any slain beast should be covered with dust ;* in order to create the greater horror and aversion to the shedding of human blood.

FOR these provocations God threatens to take vengeance ; and such a vengeance as should exceed all the tokens of sorrow to express the weight of it. This is here set forth by the Prophet's own case, whose wife was snatcht from him by the stroke of a sudden death. A wife who was the desire of his eyes, the sweetest consolation of his banishment, the better half of his life. And yet for so grievous a losſ God forbids him to shew any appearance of mourning, not to sigh or lament, not to shed a tear in publick, not to change his apparel, or shave his head, or go barefoot, or refrain from his food : But to adorn his head, and wear his shoes, and eat and drink with as much freedom, as if no misfortune had happened to him. This strange carriage of the Prophet moved his people to ask him what he meant by it. Whereupon he assured them, that he did it by God's express direction,

who had commanded him to tell them upon this occasion, in his name and words: ‘ Behold, I will profane my Sanctuary, the excellency of your strength: ‘ That Temple wherein you placed your glory, and ‘ thought my residence there your greatest protection, ‘ will I give up into the hands of the Heathen, and ‘ they shall profane and destroy it. And the desire ‘ of your eyes, that which your soul pitieith, your ‘ wives and children, shall fall by the sword. Under ‘ which heavy judgments, ye shall do as I have done: ‘ You shall not change your drefs or diet, you shall ‘ not make any outward mourning; you shall be too ‘ much in the power of your enemies, and too much ‘ astonished and confounded, to observe any forms; ‘ but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn ‘ one towards another: Ye shall waste with an inward ‘ grief, and secretly bewail your calamities.

AND thus I have shown, in various instances, how *Ezekiel* was a sign to the house of *Israel*, as declared in my Text, and how he described, by sensible representations, the miseries which God was about to bring upon them.

THAT his predictions were fully accomplished, we learn from the conclusion of the Books of *Kings* and *Chronicles*; from the xxxix and lii Chapters of *Jeremiah*; but most particularly from the *Lamentations* of that Prophet, who was an eye-witness of the desolations of his Country, and captivity of his People. And in taking a view of the ruins which he had foreseen in his prophetick Visions, he says a thing which much confirms what I have just now quoted from *Ezekiel*, *Lament.* ii. 13. *What thing shall I take to witness for thee? what thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? what shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort*

comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Sion? for thy breath is great like the sea: who can heal thee? This was an apt similitude, and suited both their religious and civil state. The banks of the sea, which are made to keep it from overflowing any Country, must be narrowly watcht, and always repaired in due season: For if the sea once makes a breach in them, it quickly gets such a head, as passes the art and power of man to restrain it. Such a sea was the atheism and immorality which broke in upon *Jerusalem*. Our two Prophets diligently watcht this sea, and cried out often for help, when they saw the banks weakened and giving way. But those who had these banks, I mean the Laws of God, in charge to maintain them, would not hear the outcry for help. Instead of that, they lent their own hands to open the breach, till the stream swelled to a deluge, so that no good Laws could stand before it, but the waves of impiety rode triumphant over them all. *Thy prophets, as Jeremiah goes on to lament, have seen vain and foolish things for thee; they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity.* Why so? could not *Jerusalem* stand firm and flourish in her own ways? So indeed these false Prophets told her; but the sacred Oracles, from the beginning of the Law to the end of the Prophets, assured her, that a deluge of corrupt manners would in time fill her with a deluge of calamities and judgments.

WHAT can be more natural, more reasonable, than that which God resolves to do in this xxiv of *Ezekiel*. ' Because, says he, *Jerusalem* will needs place ' the blood which she hath shed, upon the top of a ' rock; I also will place it there, that it shall not ' be covered: i. e. I will make her punishment as notorious

“ notorious as her sins. She hath defiled my Temple with idols, and turned her houses into meer brothels of lewdness; and she hath refused to purge them with such a reformation as I have demanded: Therefore now I will purge them with fire, and leave them a monument of my fury.”

How long did God wait? how often did he call, *Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee: lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.* But she refused to be instructed, and God’s soul did depart from her. Let us hear, and fear, and take better impressions from such words of exhortation, that they may persuade us to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts from the defilement of those sins which abound among us, which render us odious in the eyes of God, and make a way for his fiery indignation to issue out upon us. Let us speedily embrace the overtures of our peace, while the door of mercy stands open to us, turning without delay from our rebellious ways, and doing those things which are well-pleasing to God, that so we may be reconciled to him, and rejoice in the light of his countenance, and finally may obtain of him the salvation of our souls and bodies, thro’ the merits of *Jesus Christ* our Lord, to whom &c.

*The End of the Third Volume.*



